

High ambitions

Cherie Horne is cute, blonde and petite. So you may be surprised to learn she is also an elite athlete turned Mountaineer, on her way to conquering the Seven Summits. We sent Personal Trainer and health & fitness spokesperson, Craig Harper, along to chat with her. The result is just as entertaining as it is inspiring.

Q How and why did a 30-year-old girl end up with the dream of climbing the Seven Summits (the highest mountain on each continent)?

A My Seven Summits quest is a natural progression from my shattered Olympic dreams. I am a former Australian junior track and cross country champion and hoped to represent Australia in the Olympic Games. Due to injuries, I was forced to retire from competitive running in 2000.

I was introduced to mountaineering in 2004 when I approached the Victorian Police Everest Team to participate in their training program and then join them as support crew for their expedition in 2005. It was during those life changing three months at Base Camp, Mount Everest that I fell in love with the mountains and decided I wanted to challenge myself and attempt to climb the Seven Summits of the world!

This is a feat only eighteen women in the world have achieved. No Australian born woman has completed all seven summits, so that is a big motivator for

me. The fact that I am 30 is irrelevant; age is just a number (I look about 20 anyway). Life is short and to be lived and I'm all about squeezing every ounce out of it. I guess I like living to the max and besides, you've got to have a dream for dreams to come true!

Q What appeals to you about climbing?

A I recall saying to my Dad as a teenager that I wanted to climb Mount Everest in the future! Mountains, fresh air, nature, captivating views, simplicity, freedom, that's the appeal for me. My Seven Summits goal is the ultimate physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual endeavour. Pushing myself out of my comfort zone is a great way to grow and experience life to the fullest. Otherwise you risk staying inert, motionless in a world that offers so much if you are prepared to get out and have a go!

The beauty and solitude of mountaineering is indescribable; it is where I feel most at peace and in touch

with myself. I find this so refreshing from the superficial modern day chaos; the crazy rushed existence that society almost forces us to conform to.

The other wonderful aspect of mountaineering and travelling around the world is integrating with other people and experiencing different cultures, lifestyles and philosophies. That for me is so enriching.

Q How many 30-year-old girls do this?

A To my knowledge, in Australia very few! There certainly weren't many girls living at base camp Mount Everest last year! Hopefully I can change that and raise the profile of mountaineering for females in Australia. I definitely encourage energetic adventure chicks to give it a go. It's awesome; it involves physicality, independence, freedom and a huge adrenalin rush! It would be great to have some training and travel partners. Then I wouldn't have to train alone all the time!

Q Aren't you scared? The Seven Summits are a big challenge.

A No. I am excited! In saying that however, I am well aware of the dangers and under no illusions of the possible risks involved in mountaineering. Fear is a negative emotion, which restricts, inhibits and destroys plans. It's undisciplined thinking and I try not to engage in that whenever possible. I am not going to let fear stop me from following my goals in life. I constantly visualise standing on top of each mountain and feel the exhilaration and satisfaction that it will bring. That's a sensation worth bottling! Standing on top of Europe's highest mountain, Mount Elbrus in September this year, was totally amazing; an inexpressible, cathartic experience that I will never forget.

Q What are the skills, qualities and attributes of a great climber?

A I believe a great mountaineer (and I don't consider myself in that league yet – but certainly aspire to become one) must have total respect and love for the mountains. They must be experienced and have adequate skills and knowledge to prevent and avoid the obvious dangers involved in mountaineering.

You require exceptional physical strength and endurance and physiologically must have the constitution to cope with the demands of high altitude exposure. Mental toughness, determination and dedication are imperative, along with good judgement, self-awareness and independence. I also believe strong spiritual convictions are very important (certainly for me anyway) and a huge amount of self-belief. And, finally, you probably have to be a little crazy (but in a good way of course) as humans aren't designed to climb to altitudes of above 8000 metres – that's why they call it the 'death zone'!

Q Is it an expensive sport? Are you sponsored?



A Unfortunately it is, which is my greatest dilemma. Expedition costs, climbing permits, logistics, airfares, equipment and clothing don't come cheap. I'm not sponsored at this stage but I've just created my own website (www.cherihorne.com) which will hopefully raise my profile and convince potential sponsors that I am worthy of sponsorship. In addition, I've been invited to become an ambassador for The Fred Hollows Foundation which is a huge honour. Having such a wonderful humanitarian purpose to promote and raise awareness for is as equally important to me as my individual ambition to climb the Seven Summits of the world.

Q At the risk of getting in trouble, would it be fair to suggest that there aren't too many stilettos or handbags in your wardrobe?

A Stilettos? What are they? Don't you wear them on your head or something? Seriously, no I don't have a pair and guarantee that I could not even stand up, let alone walk in those ludicrous things! Handbag? No, don't have one of those either, what would I put in it? I don't wear make-up! Well, actually my very stylish and sophisticated friend kindly forced me to take one of hers, just so my wardrobe contained the (apparently) mandatory female accessory!

Q Tell us about your climbing experience so far, and your plans for the future?

A I don't consider myself an experienced mountaineer yet, more like an extremely determined adventurer at the very early stages of her mountaineering journeys. The next few years are going to be intense and provide a huge learning curve for me in many aspects of my life. I plan to climb all of the Seven Summits over the next three years, culminating with Everest in 2010.

I learned so much about what true expedition mountaineering involves at base camp Mount Everest in 2005. I talked to experienced mountaineers from all over the world and most significantly became friends with the real heroes and experts of the Himalayas – the incredible Sherpa climbers. Not only are they incredibly strong athletes but truly beautiful people. I was so fortunate to get a taste of climbing in the infamous Khumbu Icefalls (often described as the most dangerous region of climbing Everest) by a very special and talented climbing Sherpa Pema Nurbu. Sadly, Pema was tragically killed in an avalanche only a few months after I returned to Australia.

In late 2005 I spent a short time in New Zealand's Tasman Glacier region. This year I have climbed Mount Kosciusko and Mount Elbrus – two of the Seven Summits. I will climb Mount Kilimanjaro in January 2007 and the remaining four over the next three years.

Q Who has inspired you and helped you to this point in time?

A Many people from all walks of life have and continue to inspire me. In relation to mountaineering, Brigitte Muir (first Australian to climb the Seven Summits) and the late Sue Fear (Everest summiteer who was tragically killed this year in a crevasse fall), are Australian women I respect and admire.

John Taylor, Everest summiteer and member of the 2005 Victorian Police Everest Team has been an inspirational friend to me. Away from mountaineering I have a close group of special people in my life that I treasure and couldn't do without. And, of course my wonderful parents; my father is and will always be my greatest inspiration!

Q Do you get frustrated by people who seemingly focus on what they can't do rather than what they can?

A Yes I do! I believe the only limits in life are the ones we put on ourselves, so focusing on the negatives rather than the positives is totally unproductive. The ability to block out the unnecessary puts goals within reach. I believe optimism and enthusiasm is the answer to negativity, as it creates action. Action leads to adventure, excitement and endless possibilities in life. Anything is attainable if you are prepared to commit to a goal and make the sacrifices needed to achieve it!

Q Are people surprised when they discover that the 'hard core' adventure chick is in fact a petite, 54kg blonde from Melbourne?

A Yes, at first glance before they get to know me, I dare say most people are amazed and a little intrigued! 'Hard core', yeah...I like that! Surprising what can come in little packages! I'm a very determined, passionate and dedicated girl on a mission! I'm also blonde, rather small (but very muscular) and 30! That definitely does not exclude me from being a hardcore adventure chick who has a work ethic and attitude of a tiger (but an absolute softie and deep thinker at heart!) *



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