

I run up mountains

Mountain climbing hasn't developed much in the past fifty years or so, but I want to introduce a new style. I call it 'skyrunning'. It means climbing high mountains as fast as possible and using as little equipment as possible. Skyrunning is the most honest kind of mountaineering.

Some years ago, I decided to climb Mount Aconcagua, in the Andes, which usually takes three days. I didn't have that sort of time – so I thought about how it could be done more quickly. In the end, I managed it in four hours and twenty-five minutes. Since then I've climbed several mountains this way, including the 'seven summits', the highest mountains on each continent. **(1)**..... When I climbed Mount Everest, the only nutrition I took with me was carbohydrate gels, salted crackers and about three litres of rosehip tea. It took me sixteen hours and forty-two minutes to go up – a new speed record on the northern route.

I have also set speed records on Antarctica's Mount Vinson, the Carstensz Pyramid in New Guinea and other summits. Attempts such as these need months of training and preparation, as with any serious sports. To build up strength, I sometimes haul an enormous tractor tyre behind me while running uphill. **(2)**..... I call it 'the beast' because of the aggressive energy I build up during these training sessions.

The psychological side of training is as important as the physical. I use foreign languages to affect my mental state and enhance my performance. I shout things out in these, even though I know there's nobody to hear me. I'm Austrian and speak only a few words of the Russian language. **(3)**..... I couldn't tell you why that should be the case.

Whereas Russian is full of energy and strength, English is a language that calms me and helps me to focus. Two years ago, I was climbing in Nepal and knew that I was in danger from avalanches. I noticed that I kept saying to myself: 'Hey man,

take care!' (4)..... It was as if one part of me had stepped outside myself to make sure I made the right decisions, and that phrase helped.

For other people, this might sound ridiculous, but I don't care. In high altitudes, any mistake can be lethal, and I know how it feels to face death. Seventeen years ago, when I was twenty-four, I was climbing with a friend in the Karakoram mountains in Pakistan at about 18,000 feet. (5)..... It was the sound of an avalanche, which hit us and broke my right thighbone.

My friend pulled me out of the snow, but although we had survived, we realised he wouldn't be able to drag me back to the base camp. I said: 'Go, just leave me here.' And he left me behind. I lay alone in the mountains for days. Sometimes I hallucinated, other times I shouted. (6)..... Finally, my friend came back with other climbers and saved me. I thought extreme mountaineering was too risky at first, but slowly my perspective changed.

There are so many mountains to climb, but I know my records won't last forever. In ten or twenty years, skyrunning will be established as a sport. I see myself as a pioneer.

- A All kinds of songs I'd never thought twice about ran through my mind.
- B I can drag this for four hours at a time.
- C I couldn't stop repeating that.
- D I managed to get up all of those without any oxygen or tents.
- E It's the one I use when I need to push forward through heavy snow, however.
- F Suddenly, there was an incredible rumble up above us.
- G These clearly came as quite a shock.