

ADVENTURE LIFE



OF A ETIME

The most recognisable face of adventure and survival, **Bear Grylls**, has done it all. He was the youngest Briton to summit Everest, completed the world's highest paramotor flight and has gone on to be a two-time Emmy winner for his world-famous survival shows. **Anna Smith** sat down with Bear in August to get to know the man behind the adventures.



Bear Grylls needs no introduction. Having been an adventurer, survival expert and star of the small screen for almost three decades, he's seen the world in a way most people could only dream of.

From his time in the British Special Forces to the world's highest paramotor flight and surviving the wilderness with the likes of Barack Obama and Will Ferrell, he's collected a few stories to tell and a lot of wisdom.

Having just become an ambassador for outdoor apparel, equipment and footwear company, Jack Wolfskin, Bear sat down with us in August to impart some of this hard-earned knowledge. He told us what makes a great adventurer, how adventure has changed over the years, and what wilderness survival is really like in front of a camera...

Nature/Nurture

Bear Grylls, christened Edward Michael Grylls in June 1974, has been adventurous since day one. Hailing from Northern Ireland, then moving to the Isle of Wight at four, the stage was set and beautifully dressed for a life of exploration. With his sister's nickname of Bear and his dad's passion for climbing, the Bear Grylls we know today was already in the making.

By the time he was a teenager he had mastered sky-diving and martial arts and would help found the first mountaineering club at Eton College. He had quickly developed the skills and knowledge to become a survival and business success, though, speaking over the phone from his island off the coast of Wales, he located the success of his expeditions somewhere else;

"I think skills can be learned; character is more important. I always take expedition members who I know and trust. All great expeditions have bad moments of high tension, high drama. As I say, adventure begins when things go wrong - when things begin to go wrong, you see what people are made of. You want people beside you in those intense moments that you like, you trust, and you know that their character is kind and resilient and optimistic. I think that's a big one, having a problem-solving attitude, not an ego, not a panicker. It comes back to kindness. Kind and resilient problem solvers. Those are the things you really want beside you, there's not a lot of mention there of talented, super strong and brilliant, those things are far down the list compared to those other qualities."

Having left school and gone straight into the armed forces (21 SAS) for a taste of exploration and travel, these qualities became indispensable for him in some of the harshest environments on earth.

Above

Bear Grylls has three decades of experience in the adventure industry

Right

His time serving in the Special Forces prepared him for the world's harshest environments



“True courage is often quiet and true courage is often selfless, and I've seen it many times on high mountains, and through the military stuff as well.

One thing that always stands out to me was a sergeant I had in the SAS called Chris Carter, who's no longer alive now - he lost his life in Afghanistan. I always remember when I was a young trooper, age 20, and he was my sergeant. We were in the desert and out of water in roasting hot conditions. We were waiting for a helicopter extraction that was delayed by a few days. We had a long desert march to reach this extraction point and were rationing our water, literally capsule by capsule. I was really struggling. I just remember, in the middle of the night we'd stopped for a little sip and he could see that I was really, really struggling. I remember him quietly giving me his last capsule of water. No fuss, nobody saw. He just made me have it. That gave me strength, not so much physically, but it was just sheer love care and kindness and leadership, and it gave me this inner strength to keep going. He never mentioned it again, and whenever I think of moments of kindness, I think back to that great man. Belief and care and selflessness are the powerful things in our life.”

A Life Well Lived

A parachute malfunction ended Bears military career only three years after it had started. When his parachute failed to properly deploy over south-eastern Africa he broke his spine in three places. For many, once escaping with their life, this would mean the end of adventurous pursuits, but just 18 months later Bear became the youngest Brit at the time to climb Everest.

Though he has since described it as “three months of misery”, this achievement brought Bear to the attention of the national media and cemented his status as an international adventurer and survivalist. His incredible recovery is brought back to him time and time again as he wrote on Instagram: “People sometimes ask me if my back ever hurts having broken it all those years ago in a parachuting accident. The answer is every day.”

He elaborated for us; “If you're going to live a life of adventure, in whatever way, you're going to pick up injuries and scars. It's just a part of it. It's part of a life well lived. It's that quote, ‘you don't want to arrive at the end of your life in a perfectly preserved body. What a waste’ [paraphrasing Hunter S. Thompson]. I want to go skidding in sideways covered in scars, screaming ‘Ya Hoo! What a ride’. You just have to adapt, don't you?”

Make [scars] reminders to be smart and do what you can to avoid injury. And make sure the bang is always worth the buck on things. But the scars are reminders of great adventures, and the aches and pains that remain are part of it. They're not a reason not to do stuff. You just adapt. More importantly, what I've learned is

healing is all around us. However badly hurt you are the best healing is in nature.”

But, despite his success, had his injury ever held him back?

“I think you choose your adventures more. Our inspirations change over the years, and we do things that are within our capabilities and within our own limitations. For me, my main change is I don't want to be away for months and months now. I don't want to be away from my family.”

Breaking his back was clearly an after-thought now, swept up by the joys and pains of being a father.

“There's a place for those hyper-dangerous expeditions but you don't want to be doing that every month. Now I want a short, sharp, with great friends, exciting and challenging but also where we can manage the risk. Not too much objective danger, like don't be on avalanche terrain for crazy amounts of time, because you only get it wrong once in the wild. So choose your risks and make sure they're risks you can manage and have a backup plan because things go wrong. That's how it's changed for me.”

The Weird and The Wonderful

His personal life isn't the only thing that has changed over the years. What followed on from the Everest expedition was a litany of adventures and records, each stranger than the last. From circumnavigating the UK on jet skis (a 30-day affair), to rowing down the Thames in a bathtub naked to raise money for a friend who lost his legs in a mountaineering accident, to the world's highest paramotor flight (a fan powered handglider) over Everest.

However, when adventuring is your main priority, funding has to be a close second;

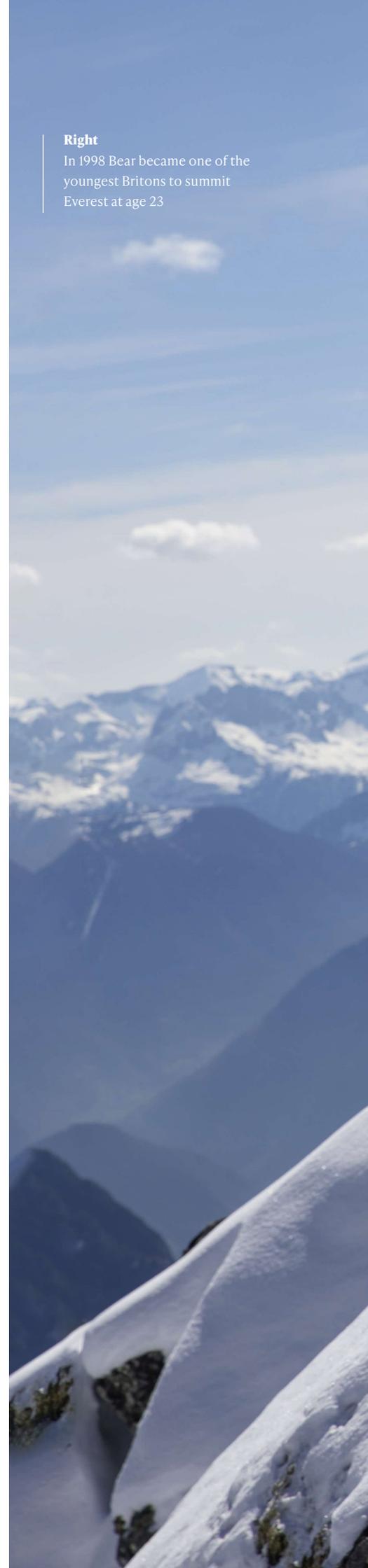
“In the early days, the records were a hook to attract sponsors, but I've always tried to pick adventure that inspires. But [breaking records] was always the least important part for me, and as the years have gone on the luxury of not having to seek it out has been a great freeing process - to be able to pursue adventure for the adventure rather than anything else. I see it more and more with eyes that are less interested or impressed by just records - it becomes about the self. Great adventures become about other people. We always try and attach charitable endeavours to it as well. Especially in the early days it was so important, making it about something greater than the expedition. We do a lot for the Scouts still. We do a lot for the Royal Marines and I do a lot for conservation. It makes it something bigger than just the adventure.”

Now blessed with a sustainable income, I wondered if this motivation had changed.

“TV has been a huge part of it but, we should be honest, it has also pulled away from the adventure, because you've got to make a TV show along the way. Through my life, I've learned the

Right

In 1998 Bear became one of the youngest Britons to summit Everest at age 23





Left

Bear has five concurrently running TV shows that all see him survive the wilderness

Right

He has a number of world records for bizarre adventures





greatest adventures are unfiled, and just with really great friends. Low key, nobody knows about them, we go and just have great trips. I try and do one or two of those a year. The TV stuff obviously is the work, but I love the dynamic of a few great friends - my sons are often a part of that as well. It might not be ground-breaking, but it gets back to what the root of adventure is about, which is connection and loving the outdoors and everything that it can bring. We grow when we are challenged and challenges are best done alongside those you love."

At the risk of great irony, I poked around to find out what Mr. Adventure himself gets up to when the camera isn't on.

"We have a little place up in the mountains in Switzerland. I'm planning [a trip] at the moment, just with a few friends, heading up into the mountains. I've got a couple of buddies coming in from different corners of the world and we'll bring the paragliders and mountain bikes and the base-jumping rigs and we'll go and have a great time. I love those sort of low key trips. It doesn't have to be for long but it's old friends that I've done many things with over the years. I love the TV adventures too, but it's definitely more work, it feels more like work for me, whether it's Running Wild or whatever, you've got to be really on it. You're going to more extreme places and you're taking a rookie so you have to look after them. It's a different dynamic."

The Face of Adventure

In between hosting the world's highest open-air dinner party (at 7,600m) and the record setting paramotor flight, his hit tv show *Man vs Wild*, or *Born Survivor* as it's called in some territories, was launched. It ran from 2006 to 2012 and was nominated for an Emmy. This show would go on to define Bear's career, launch his successful and ongoing run as a TV host and cement him as the face of British adventure and survival.

15 more shows have graced televisions all over the world with Bear as the presenter or host, five of which are still airing now. They vary in their form and presentation but all see Bear surviving in the wild. From remote islands, to jungles, mountains and even the occasional urban disaster zone, he must do anything in his power to make it to safety. This swings from the sublime to the ridiculous with legitimate survival advice interspersed with view boosting stunts like squeezing water out of elephant dung.

This doesn't go unacknowledged though. Early on in *Man vs Wild's* run, a programme consultant went to the press saying Bear was staying in motels and had scenes set up for him when he was supposed to be surviving on a remote Hawaiian island. Bear responded:

"This is a worst-case scenario show, and therefore, of course things have to be planned. Otherwise, it would just be me in the wild and nothing happening, you know, 'cause textbook survival says you land, you get yourself comfortable, you wait for rescue, you don't do anything. It would be a very boring show... I get a really good briefing before we go."

Channel 4 commented: "Born Survivor is not an observational documentary series, but a "how to" guide to basic survival techniques in extreme environments"

With a combined 1.2 billion viewers over its run, the way some scenes were produced didn't detract from the fact that it made for great telly and Bear was the perfect host. After 17 years of teaching people how to survive the wild, it felt almost cruel to ask him to distil his knowledge into one simple sentence, but I couldn't help myself.

"What is the one piece of advice you would give to people to give them the best chance in the wild?"

"Never give up. NGU. Write it in your heart, write it in your spirit. It conquers everything. Skills and everything else can be learned. Ultimately, real survival and real adventure is going to reach a crux. You

Left

Living on an off-grid island means every day is an adventure for Bear and his family

Right

Bear's next pursuit is a live show; the *Never Give Up Tour*



need respect obviously then, and you need courage, quiet courage to face some fears, because those moments are going to be scary, but ultimately, what conquers everything is that resilient, dogged, never say die, tenacious, never give up, NGU, spirit. So number one is always that... the rest follows if you've got that. All the great stories hinge on that thing."

Embracing the Future

With a global career, a family and the hard won freedom to adventure for adventures sake, it is difficult to know what Bear will take on next. As legitimate, headline-grabbing records become more and more niche, I was interested to know what the future held, if not for him, for the industry.

"I think the answer is different for everyone. For me, you've got to try and live life, live your adventures, follow your heart wherever that's 'gonna take you - we all have different dreams. The difference nowadays is the awareness that we're all global citizens. You've got to be respectful of the world and communities. But go for it, travel and explore and know that adventure is a state of mind. When I say that I mean it's about how you live your life. It's how you approach businesses and relationships and everything you do.

Don't pursue just the big-ticket things but find great local adventures. You don't need to go to the other end of the earth. Adventure is all around most of us, even if you're in a city you're never far from hills and rivers. So, the future of it is local, is being respectful of wild places and communities, and accessible. It's much more accessible to everyone now, and that's a great thing. Adventure is a state of mind, and it's accessible to you."

In terms of what's next for him personally, I wanted to know what someone who has done every adventure, that I at least could think of, hasn't done yet. And what's missing off what must be the world's shortest bucket list? It turns out, Bear is more interested in what he is doing now;

"We live in North Wales up on this little island. It's an amazing place. Adventure's at the heart of this place because it's offshore. We're off grid - just getting to the mainland to get supplies is an adventure involving bikes and RIBs and big seas. A big part of our family and our children's upbringing is respecting nature and the weather and all of that. So, I think we're lucky that adventure is part of life and not something we've had to seek out. We use the paragliders a lot and the paramotors, so we do a lot of adventures from home. Those are the best one. We have lots of fun."

Aside from his weekly endurance trials to get the groceries, Bear remains the Chief Scout, has five concurrently running TV shows, is a best-selling author and is embarking on a UK tour, inspiring audiences with the tales of his adventures and survival. He shows no signs of slowing down.

Not wanting to leave our conversation without squeezing as much advice as I could out of one of the world's most seasoned adventurers, I asked for one final piece of wisdom.

"Fear is good. Fear is natural. Fear says you're doing something different and uncomfortable, and that's where we grow. So don't run away from the fear. Embrace it - when it starts to tingle, know that you're on the right path. Plan new adventures, be prepared for them. Start small, start local. Do it with a great friend. And know that adventure is the state of mind, it's how you live your life every day." 

