



A fear of heights isn't the best qualification for breaking a mountaineering record. But Annabelle Bond isn't one to let a mere phobia get in the way of achieving something remarkable, as James Drury discovered.

The Ultimate Bond Girl

It is hard to imagine the glamorous socialite sitting across from me at the Churchill Hotel in London spending months in tents in some of the world's most dangerous and inhospitable places. But, as she casually tells of her adventures, of becoming the first woman to complete The Seven Summits challenge within a year, of taking on feats few women have achieved before (and very few men, for that matter) Annabelle Bond has an open manner and a broad smile – and I quickly realise that to judge this book by its cover would be a grave mistake.

Her list of achievements is daunting. The Seven Summits, for instance, are the highest peaks on each continent. Scaling all of them is a challenge that only about 100 people have ever completed, and she did them all in record time. I almost expect to see Superwoman's cape and boots hanging up in the corner of the room. Yet, dip a toe into her family's history and you find they are no strangers to adventure. Her grandmother Christine Bond journeyed to the Himalayas in 1928 aged 21. 'Looking at her pictures, I guess it has always been something that's intrigued me,' says Bond. '[But] I never thought I would go climbing because I'm scared of heights!'

The opportunity for her to follow in her grandmother's footsteps started as a joke, when her mother met Chilean banker and climber Andronico Luksic at a function. 'At this point I had only climbed two mountains,' she recalls. 'My mother told him I was really good – typical proud mum! – and he asked if I would be interested in coming on the Everest '04 expedition. She said yes, and when she mentioned it to me I became determined to go on the trip.'

Luksic was not expecting her to take the offer seriously. She later found out the team had a secret contingency plan to ditch her. But, nothing if not determined, she proved her worth to the team.

Bond knew she had the fitness to complete a summit day. When living in Hong Kong she had developed a love of long-distance running and competed four times in the MacLehose Trail – a 64-mile mountain marathon run. She says it was the knowledge that she had the endurance to complete such a gruelling challenge that drove her on.

'I'm not a technical climber, but I have the endurance,' she says. 'I knew I could run for 20 hours, so I knew I was capable of doing a summit day. [Mountaineering] is about knowing yourself and knowing your limits. You have to know you have enough energy to get back down – most people die on the way down because they are so exhausted.'

So on 15 May 2004, as she stood on top of the world, a cocktail of exhilaration and terror was swirling in her head. The rest of the team arrived at the summit an hour later and offered her their phone to call home, but she



FACING DEATH
ON EVERY CLIMB
WAS ONE OF THE
HARDEST PARTS OF
THE FEAT.



The challenging peaks of Everest made it one of Bond's most exhilarating experiences.

The Eve Appeal

Gynaecology Cancer Research Fund



THE EVE APPEAL

The Eve Appeal's primary purpose is to raise money for one of the world's largest and most successful gynaecological cancer research programmes.

Headed by Professor Ian Jacobs, the UK's leading gynaecological oncologist, the programme is well on the way to creating the tools and methods which the charity is optimistic will lead to a 50% reduction in deaths from ovarian cancer, as well as impacting significantly on the other gynaecological cancers.

Caring for women is at the heart of what the Eve Appeal does. Its programme covers a broad spectrum of research, from basic science to managing symptoms, looking at all angles to ensure that women are given a better chance of beating this deadly illness.

Research funded by the Eve Appeal is pioneering better ways of predicting which women will develop ovarian cancer, investigating and testing better methods of detecting it at an earlier and more treatable stage, discovering more effective treatments and working with doctors and nurses to improve the care of women with cancer.

This is a well-established programme of international importance. Its impact is already being felt not only on the lives of individual women but across the global cancer research community.

Further information

Helen Mitchell

Tel: +44 20 7380 6900

Email: appeal@eveappeal.org.uk

was worried about jinxing the descent. Facing death on every climb was one of the hardest parts of the feat. Bond had a number of close calls. She remembers being so keen to beat the record that while on McKinley she slipped on a rope. 'It's amazing how fast you pick up speed,' she remembers. 'I think you could have heard me scream in Anchorage.' She was saved by her guide.

But exhaustion is the real killer. On reaching the summit of Argentina's Aconcagua – the highest mountain in the Americas – her energy evaporated and she collapsed, unable to move. 'It was just me and a Sherpa and I thought to myself, "I can't expect him to carry me down"', she remembers. 'He had to stand me up, but I would just collapse down again. I just lay there. I was so exhausted that in my summit photo I couldn't even move a chunk of frozen hair which was across my face.'

With help, she finally got to her feet and just managed to make the descent. She went straight to hospital in Buenos Aires, but she was under no illusions about how close she had come. 'That's how people die,' she says. 'I was at 23,000ft and I just felt like "I just want to stay here. I don't care anymore, I'm feeling so terrible."'

One of the boys

For Bond, the highlight of the Seven Summits was Everest, perhaps because of, rather than despite, its immense challenges. 'I spent two-and-a-half months living in a very primitive environment,' she tells me. 'But what's hard is that you do not know if you are going to make it or not. You go through some huge emotions. There's avalanches every day at Base Camp and Camp One. You live in this fear that something will happen to you. I would hear sounds [of movement] in the ice flow and know that it moves seven or eight inches a day and that if it moves when you're in it...' she drifts off, the idea of being crushed by the vast weight of the moving ice left hanging in the air.

She may be known for being the woman who took lipstick up Everest, but she did not get special treatment from the rest of the team: 'They brutalised me in training. When everyone is climbing, you do not get men saying "can I carry your bag for you"'. They were saying "hey, *gringa*, you go first on this crevasse". You have to be one of the boys.'

So no hair straighteners, then? 'No!' she laughs. 'My hat didn't come off my head for six weeks when I was on Everest.'

Health concerns

It wasn't just mountaineering challenges she had to cope with while breaking the record. Three weeks before she was due to climb Everest, Bond found out she had an ovarian tumour. It was a harrowing wait to find out whether it was malignant or not. 'If I didn't have Everest planning to distract me, I think I would have gone crazy waiting for the results,' she admits. 'But I knew that, irrespective of the results, I wanted to be able to climb. My team leader said he would still take me if my parents agreed.'

The tumour, it turned out, was benign, but the experience has left its mark. 'I was in peak condition,' she says. 'If it could happen to me, then everyone needs to get screened. Prevention is better than cure.'

All her sponsorship from the Seven Summits, and her activities since, have gone to the Eve Appeal, a charity which funds pioneering research into gynaecological cancers: 'It's a good cause and a lot of what I do is about women's empowerment.'

Her efforts have raised more than \$1.6 million for the Eve Appeal, but fundraising is no easy task. 'Sponsorship was the hardest thing in the world to do,' she says. 'I had five weeks to raise money. My mum would find me at my computer at 3am. Everyone you can name, I was in touch with them. But I had so many rejections – it's so demoralising.'

Again her feminine wiles come through. 'I have been asked the question "does it help to be a woman?" and the answer is yes, in this case it really did,' she says. 'What I was doing was so unusual. Everyone has to have an angle so to be the only woman in the world to do this in under a year was mine. It also helped that it was for a good cause.'

And there appears to be no let-up for Bond. Last year she decided to do the Atacama Desert Race, which involves crossing the 250km Atacama Desert in Chile. However, despite months of training, she had to pull out at the last minute due to illness.

Fortunately, her sister Lucy and friend Sissel Smaller went on to win the race for the women. 'I was frustrated at not being able to do it,' she says. 'But if you throw up all night you can't do the race.'

Cultural lessons

Although gruelling, her experiences have taught her a great deal. 'Places on the Seven Summits have different cultures and I had never been exposed to them before,' she says. 'After five months I was either raising money or climbing. It was a whole year of my life that I was removed from society.'

But she seems in no doubt about what she would prefer to have been doing. 'At the end of the day, I've had the most enriching experience. The one thing I've learned is that even though we have everything in our society, the people who seem the happiest are the Sherpas and those in Africa. There's a lot we can do to help in terms of infrastructure and schooling. They are amazingly happy people with very little. It's humbling to spend time with them.'

So, what next for Annabelle Bond? She has recently been made a Zulu princess and is ambassador to the Star School in South Africa, which helps educate children about AIDS. This appears to be where her future lies. 'That's what I'm interested in,' she states. 'I love going there and seeing what I can do to help. There are the most incredible people there. I want to do more work on humanitarian issues.'

She adds: 'I'm also writing a book about my experiences which I hope will inspire other women to try things.' ■