



The day job

Do you dream of earning a living from a life in the outdoors?

Suzy Madge is a professional ski mountaineer and adventure filmmaker (among other stuff). We're jealous...



“Ever since I was a little girl I knew marriage and offices weren’t for me,” says Suzy Madge, who has an array of wonderful job titles: ski mountaineer, adventure filmmaker, adventure athlete, motivational speaker, tour guide and life coach.

“Any time on the computer still feels like I’m wasting my life,” she adds.

Suzy, who’s 37, has been into sport from a young age, and played tennis for Great Britain as a teenager. At 18 she began skiing and windsurfing...and in 2008 became the first British woman to climb up and ski down Cho Oyu, an 8,201m mountain in the Himalayas. How did it happen?

“Ski mountaineering came about because I love skiing powder and got carried away finding it,” explains Suzy who, surprisingly enough, is talking to us from Chamonix. “Then, while scrambling down Aconcagua on foot, I had a five-second epiphany that skiing down high mountains would be better than walking. So I climbed and skied higher and higher.”

Suzy made her first film in 2007. Called ‘I can do that’ it was about her climbing

and skiing expedition on Mustagata, a 7,546m peak in western China.

“I wanted to make a film about high altitude skiing that illustrated the fun, laughter and philosophy of mountaineering, not just the drama and danger,” she says. “I also wanted to show that normal people and women can do this stuff, not just icicle-encrusted beardies.”

She’s since made another two films – *Mansions in the Sky*, which showed on the BBC, and *Skiing the Sky Below*, which was on tour with the 2010 Kendal Mountain Festival.

Suzy built up savings in her 20s by working as a tour guide to fund her lifestyle, and she also has a psychology degree that helps her work as a life coach, a motivational speaker and a writer. To ask her for a typical day at work then feels a bit foolish, but we try it anyway:

“I wake at 7am and do one hour of meditation and pilates as I have a serious back condition,” she says. “Morning is out doing sport – either ski mountaineering or windsurfing. I’m back for a late lunch and then three or four hours working on the phone or at the computer writing or editing.

“Being outside a lot of the day is the best part of the job, as well as inspiring people that they can do more and be more themselves.”

Suzy’s next big expedition is to ski mountaineer the Qala-e Hurst valley in north east Afghanistan, where many of the mountains are still unclimbed and unnamed. The all-female team, who set off at the end of May, also includes Suzy’s sister Carole, and Italian Anna Torretta, who is a world champion ice climber. They’re raising money for the Afghan charity Mountain Unity, which promotes economic development in north east Afghanistan, with a focus on mountain tourism and supporting locals to train as guides.

“As well as the personal challenge, we want to raise awareness about the beauty of a war-torn country which boasts some of the most dramatic and breathtaking mountain landscape in the world,” Suzy says.

One thing is certain – this is someone who loves her job. “If I had to do anything different I’d be any other kind of freeride athlete, like a windsurfer,” she says.

“Or a happiness philosopher.” ■

Suzy Says

Age: 37

Occupation: Adventure film maker/ski mountaineer

What’s the biggest challenge on your list of ‘things to do before I die’? Get the book I am writing published and see female adventurers represented on TV

What album or book would you wish for if you were stranded? Book:

Walden by David Henry Thoreau; album: *Symphatique* by Pink Martini

What can keep you awake at night? Good sex, good books and high altitude

What do you miss most about home when you’re away? Baths and marmite

What’s your ultimate indulgence? At the moment I am lusting after a new pair of telemarks and a new film camera

What’s your worst ever injury and how did you get it? Ahh, there’s quite a list from my early teens – knee diseases, stress fractures, fallen arches and broken legs, culminating in a smashed collarbone kitesurfing and a broken back when caught in an avalanche ski mountaineering

What’s your best characteristic? Positivity, not only within myself, but for others too

And your worst? My determination can slide into bloody mindedness

What’s your best tip for adventure filmmakers? Go to the Kendal mountain film school

Any role models? Martina Navratilova for her athleticism, kindness and tenacity

And finally, if you could have one super power, what would it be? Endless fitness while aging

