

Leo Houlding - Biographies

Summarised Biography

If modern British adventure has a face, it looks a lot like Leo Houlding. Based in the Lake District, UK, he is one of Britain's top climbers and among the best in the world. He is a veteran of a score of epic ascents, including Everest, but specialises in free climbing the most technical peaks and biggest walls in the world.

An experienced base jumper he is at the forefront of Para-Alpinism (climbing up then flying down). Leo pushes the limits of exploratory adventure by taking the ultimate in extreme sports to the most extreme environments.

An articulate communicator he has captivated and inspired audiences around the world with his tales of adrenalin-fuelled exploits.

He sports an impressive television résumé, including an infamous appearance on the BBC's Top Gear, his own show on Virgin One "Take Me To The Edge", and an IMAX movie released in 2010, "The Wildest Dream", retracing the last steps of Mallory and Irvine on their fateful expedition to Everest in 1924.

In 2009, he produced and featured in the multi award-winning movie, "The Asgard Project", an epic, arctic adventure to free climb and BASE jump from one of the world's toughest and most remote big walls.

Leo has become an ambassador for the younger generation of climbers and has been called one of Britain's top ten adventurers by The Telegraph.

Long Biography

Leo's name is synonymous with adventure climbing; he has consistently pushed at the limits of this game and in the process has carved out a media profile which has seen him appear on Top Gear and be pitched as one of Britain's top ten adventurers by The Telegraph. But don't get the wrong idea, all this media attention is well deserved - Leo is without doubt the 'real deal'.

He grew up in the Lakes and started climbing in 1990 at the age of 10. Just six months later he and his Dad acquired the taste for adventure climbing with the youngest ascent of the famous Scottish sea stack, the Old Man of Hoy. By the time Leo was 15 he had become the British Junior Indoor Climbing Champion. In 1997 he moved to North Wales and started to make a name for himself, making audacious ascents of bold climbs such as *Master's Wall* E7 6b on Clogwyn Du'r Arddu.

In 1998, still only aged 18, Leo landed in Yosemite with the similarly youthful Patch Hammond and made a landmark virtual on-sight repeat of the Huber brothers', *El Nino* 5.13c, just days after they had made the first free ascent. This remains one of the finest ever ascents of what is widely regarded to be the most influential cliff in the world.

Back in North Wales he made the first ascents of Rare Lichen and *Trauma* both E9 7a, in 1998 the hardest grade of the day. However, his true desires lay on the big walls and in 2001 he proved this again by completing the first free ascent of *The West Face of the Leaning Tower* 5.13a in Yosemite.

In 2002, a big fall on Cerro Torre in Patagonia put Leo out of action for a year with a badly broken ankle. The story of the fall became the subject of a BBC documentary and opened him up to a whole host of TV and film opportunities. He returned to Patagonia in 2005, and with Kevin Thaw made the first free ascent of the huge 1400m north pillar of Fitzroy.

In 2004, Leo began BASE jumping and has also been a pioneer of para-alpinism, a climbing

method he demonstrated on Top Gear when he and Tim Emmett climbed to the top of the Verdon Gorge then base jumped back to the bottom of the route.

In 2007, he summited Everest during the filming of the multi million pound movie, "The Widest Dream". Released in 2010 to much acclaim, the film retraces the last steps of Mallory and Irvine's fateful expedition to Everest in 1924. Taking the role of Sandy Irvine, Leo climbed in period equipment up to 7600m where they undertook the highest drama shoot in history.

Later that year Leo hosted his own Virgin One TV series, "Take me to Edge". He took five youngsters on a global journey of discovery, intended to change their perspective on life by partaking in tribal rites of passage and adventurous challenges.

In 2008, Leo was back on the big walls, this time breaking speed records. He made the first team free ascent of both the *North West Face* of Half Dome and *The Freerider* on El Cap in a single day. Over a mile of hard climbing it is a feat that most strong teams would require more than a week to achieve.

The following year saw a free attempt of the mighty *North West Face* of Mount Asgard on Baffin Island, documented in Alastair Lee's blockbuster movie "The Asgard Project". The film went on to win 20 awards, making it one of the most highly acclaimed climbing films of all time.

In 2010, he topped it all by completing his long term Yosemite project. *The Prophet* E9 7a/5.13d R on El Capitan is a truly impressive route one that Leo had tried on a number of occasions since his first attempt in 2001. Success on it is a lifetime achievement and a real highpoint in an already remarkable climbing career.

"The A1 Beauty crux of the Prophet is the most perfect pitch I could ever have imagined. Such an aesthetic line in an unequalled position, so desperately thin and painfully close to my limit. Succeeding on the first ascent is a dream come true. If I never climb anything harder I will not be disappointed."

Leo continues to work closely with his main sponsor of more than 13 years, Berghaus. He is an ambassador for the British Mountaineering Council, representative for Cumbria Tourism, Trustee of Doug Scott's Charity Community Action Nepal, member of the prestigious Cordon Rouge explorers club and patron of the UK's biggest mountain film festival - Kendal.

The most widely recognised and articulate climber of his generation, he has lectured to tens of thousands of people in more than 20 countries around the world, including being asked to speak to the British Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street in 2008. He has worked for multinational companies such as Audi, Ford and Nokia as well as specialist brands including DMM, Five-Ten and Adidas eyewear.

He continues to entertain and inspire outdoor enthusiasts and corporate audiences around the globe with his tales of leadership, risk management and 21st century exploration.

In between adventures and expeditions, Leo lives with his wife and their daughter in the Lake District in the north of England.