

Credo

WORDS BY SIMON USBORNE

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK CHIVERS

Leo Houlding

Rock climber, 27

I believe...

The fear of death keeps you alive, as long as it does not cripple you. I get much more out of life by accepting I'll die.

You don't have to be crazy to do what I do - you'd have to be crazy not to. In the past 50 years Western society has become so sanitised. We live this mundane life where nobody takes risks.

Base-jumping from a cliff you've climbed adds to the adventure. A 120mph descent is a lot more exciting than a long walk down. But it's so instantaneous; when you land, you want to go straight back up and do it again.

Climbing is a spiritual activity. There's something sublime about how pointless it is to find the most difficult way to achieve a fairly arbitrary goal - perhaps a spot at the top of a cliff.

It used to be about conquering and putting your flag at the top; now it's about the journey, not the destination. British climbers have a deserved reputation for being the most hardcore

- and for having the most fun. Many people are keeping that alive today, but for me, climbing is international and I don't define myself by my nationality.

Climbing is a way of life as much as a job and a pastime. For some climbers, who train and take a scientific, athletic approach, it has become almost like an Olympic sport. But a mountainside or cliff-face is an imperfect field and, while you need to be fit and strong, it's more to do with determination and toughness.

Spending 10 minutes alone on the summit of Everest was a special experience.

I climbed it last year for a film about the disappearance of [George] Mallory and [Andrew] Irvine [in 1924].

We followed their route using their gear. Everest is a circus full of egos, attitudes and politics, which isn't my style, but standing alone at the top was unforgettable. ■

Leo Houlding's blog is at www.berghaus.com.
With thanks to Snow & Rock

