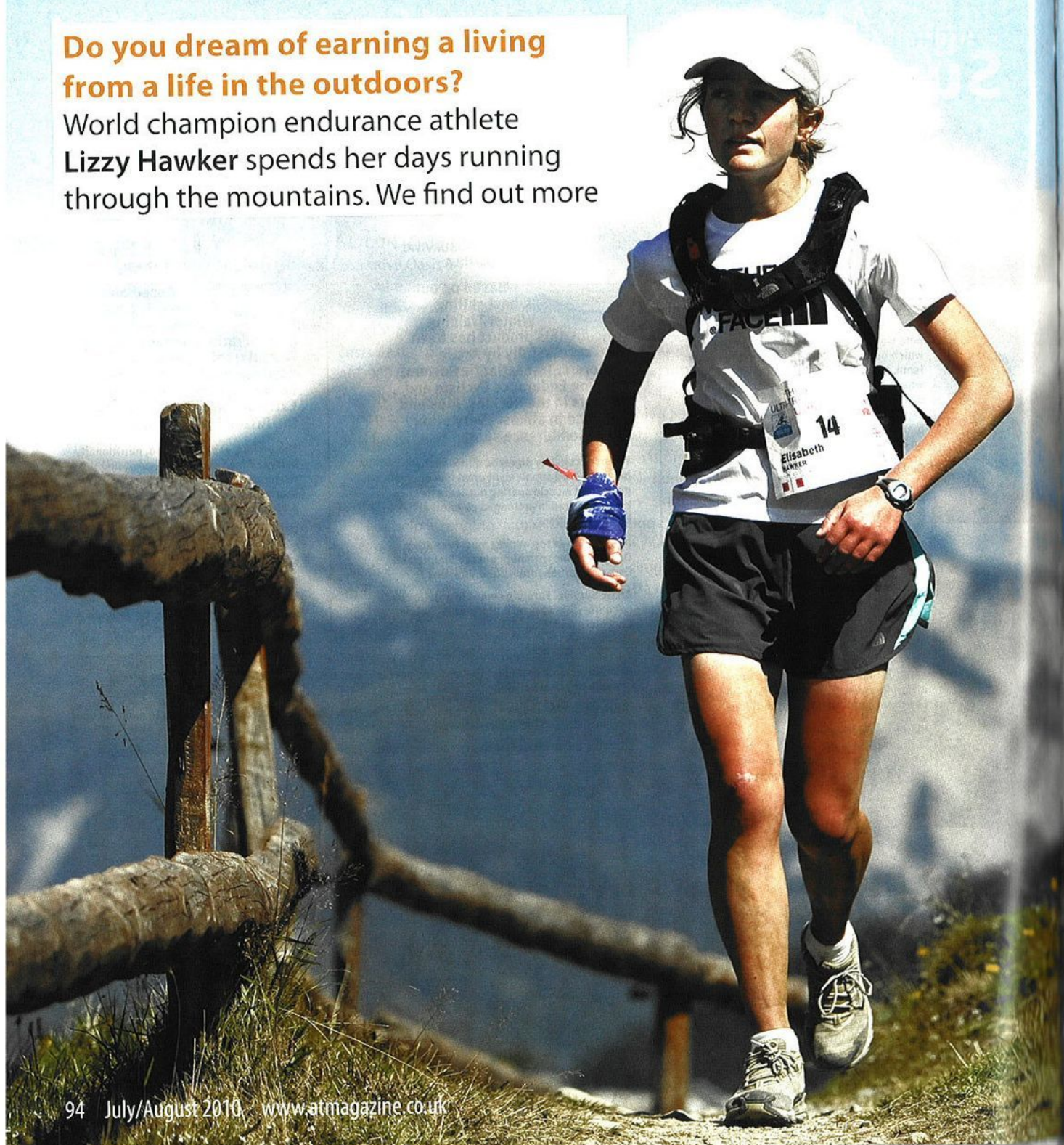


The day job

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

World champion endurance athlete
Lizzy Hawker spends her days running
through the mountains. We find out more



“The only typical thing about a day in my job is that wherever I am, I run,” says endurance athlete

Lizzy Hawker.

“If I’m out on the hill snowshoeing or running with clients all day, I fit my own training in around that,” she continues. “The only exception is when I’m on glaciated terrain – on an expedition or a ski tour.”

Lizzy’s long list of achievements includes coming first at the 2006 100km World Championship in Korea; holding the joint record for running from Everest base camp to Kathmandu (it took three days, two hours and 36 minutes), and twice being the winning woman in the 165km North Face Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc (I’m exhausted just from writing all that). But despite being so good at what she does, Lizzy didn’t discover her talent until relatively late in her life.

“I’ve always run, but at first it was only ever for myself,” says Lizzy, who’s 34 and originally from London. “I didn’t enter my first race, the London Marathon, until I was 24, and it wasn’t until I was 29 that I started running longer distances. I think the ‘endurance’ was always in me, I just didn’t realise it could have an ‘expression’ through competitive running.”

A doctor of oceanography, Lizzy used to work for the British Antarctic Survey in its Cambridge HQ: “I had far more time in the office than at sea – but I was lucky to make about eight two-month cruises during my professional career.” But her love of the mountains now sees her living, as she describes it, footloose in the Alps.

“Being an endurance athlete doesn’t earn you a full living, but it does give you a very rich life

in other ways,” she says. “Having stepped aside from my academic science career I now balance my life as an endurance athlete with work in the Alps leading alpine trail running courses and camps, and writing – my own projects, and also a variety of freelance writing and editing work.”

The races Lizzy competes in vary massively: she’s done road races from 10km to 100km, and trail and mountain races from the 12.5km Matterhornlauf with nearly 1,000m ascent to the 165km North Face Ultra Trail. And different again are the long-distance endurance challenges, such as the run from Everest base camp to Kathmandu.

“I enjoy it because I love to be on the move under my own power, and I love being in the mountains. There’s a certain enthrallment in journeying on a trail or through the mountains very simply and under your own steam, leaving nothing but your footprints, but at the same time challenging yourself to the edge, physically and mentally.

“The race isn’t what it is all about in the end. For me the competition is very much within myself – to try to do the best I can in that moment.”

So what’s her greatest ambition in the sport?

“Becoming more well-known, albeit relative (endurance running isn’t football!), gives you a platform, a responsibility, an incredible opportunity. I will always run – it has become part of me – but I may not always compete. But if through my running I can reach out to people, to inspire them in some small way, then it gives it a deeper meaning.

“This is my dream – and I think that would be my greatest achievement.” ■

See www.lizzyhawker.com.

Lizzy says

Age: 34.

Occupation: Endurance athlete, writer and scientist.



What’s the biggest challenge on your list of ‘things to do before I die’? Live the moment I have now.

What album or book would you wish for if you were stranded? A whole library – reading is one of my passions.

What can keep you awake at night? Running through the night or a moonlight ski tour. Worrying about the past or the future instead of living in the here and now.

What do you miss most about home when you’re away? I take ‘home’ with me in my heart wherever I am. But for me feeling ‘home’ is being in the mountains, and with family and friends.

What’s your ultimate indulgence?

Time alone in the mountains; sharing time with family or good friends; a good book; a glass of wine.

What’s your worst ever injury and how did you get it? A stress fracture after falling on black ice and continuing to try to run hard.

What’s your best characteristic? Tenacity.

And your worst? Self-doubt.

What’s your best tip for aspiring endurance athletes? Always run for the love of it, with heart and soul as well as your head and legs. And allow it to take you where it will.

Any role models? Anyone who truly lives each and every moment of their lives.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be? To make come true my dream, which is to encourage people to realise the inspiration of nature, the mountains, of our world; to realise the richness of our environment and our responsibility to protect it; and the value of challenging our whole selves, mentally and physically.