KILIAN JORNET
SUMMITS OF MY LIFE
DARING ADVENTURES ON THE WORLD’S GREATEST PEAKS
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It all started with a photo of the Matterhorn that hung in a frame on the wall of my childhood bedroom. That photo, no larger than any other, was the first thing I saw when I got up each morning and the last thing I saw before going to bed each night. I began to fall in love with the majestic silhouette of the mountain, desiring it and fearing it all at the same time. In my dreams, I imagined how one day I would climb it.

From a very young age, my parents would take me and my sister to climb mountains. We started with the ones closest to us, Tossa Plana de Lles, La Muga, La Carabassa, and eventually made it to ones farther away, like Aneto and Breithorn. I guess you could say that, since we started when we were so little, the mountain just became part of our way of life. By the time I was five years old, we’d already made it to peaks of over 13,000 feet. Later came various climbs around the Pyrenees, the Alps, Mont Blanc, and even trips to Argentina, Turkey, and Morocco, always to climb mountains. Our home library, full of books by Reinhold Messner, Kurt Diemberger, Roger Frison-Roche, and Walter Bonatti, filled my mind with tales of epic adventures from mountains that, at that time, seemed impossible to me, but that nonetheless fed my most secret desire: to someday set foot on those very same summits.
When I was thirteen, I began to compete in ski mountaineering. It was a good way for me to channel all of the energy that I held inside. Things went well from the start. I was motivated and loved to train, so much so that I often had to tell my coaches that I was dedicating less time to it than I actually was. If I trained 15 or 20 hours a week, I’d often claim to have put in only half of that time. My coaches back then were Jordi Canals and Maite Hernández. Jordi had been a part of the first Catalan expedition to reach the summit of Mount Everest in 1985. When I won my first ski mountaineering world title, Maite gave me a rock she had taken from the Second Step of Mount Everest, at an altitude of 28,000 feet, which she’d climbed while participating in an all-female expedition that reached the summit in 2004.

Whenever I trained, I liked to suffer, and I suppose that’s why the results came so quickly. At 17, I began to compete in mountain running, and, with my background in ski mountaineering and the technique I’d acquired from so many hours of training, I didn’t have to wait long for the good results to roll in.

It’s satisfying when your dreams become a reality, but it’s a sad moment, too: The source of the motivation that pushed me to work a little harder in a competition or to train a couple more hours, the nerves I’d have before each competition that I’d been dreaming about winning for so many years . . . all of that disappeared. I wasn’t even 25 years old, and I’d already crossed every competition I’d ever wanted to participate in and win off my list. I’m not a person who settles for always doing the same thing over and over. I don’t get motivated to train every day just from trying to win the same competitions and boost my career statistics. For me, it’s quality that’s most important, the ability to face new challenges head-on.
It was at the end of the very busy 2011 trail running season—I had won the European Skyrunning Championships in both short and long distance, as well as the Vertical Kilometer; the Giir di Mont for the fourth time; the Kinabalu for the third time; The North Face 100 in Australia; the Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc for the third time; the Western States; the Zegama for the fourth time; the Table Mountain in South Africa; the Pierra Menta for the third time; the International Ski Mountaineering Federation Cup and Championship, in both the individual and Vertical Race categories. . . . It was after all of that when I began to feel depressed. It might seem silly: I’d been at the top of the competitive world for years, but I knew that even at such a high level, what I was truly capable of went beyond what was being asked of me in competition, so much so that I felt I was missing out on opportunities to really discover myself, to do new things that would allow me to open myself up to experiences in a new way.
One day as I came back from the mountain alone, I recalled the dreams of my past. The image that came to me was that old photo of the Matterhorn, and with that image came the rest of the mountains that I had read and heard so many stories about when I was young. Perhaps this moment, when the baggage of competition was weighing me down the most, was the time to set off for those places. Over the years, I’d had the chance to meet people like Marino Giacometti, the father of skyrunning, who during the 1980s and 1990s ascended some of the most mythical peaks on the planet with only the most necessary resources. He was the one who led runners like Fabio Meraldi, Jean Pellissier, Pep Ollé, and Bruno Brunod to set the speed records for the ascent and descent of Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, Aconcagua, Mount Kenya, the Matterhorn. . . . I was most tempted—and, at the same time, afraid—to break the Matterhorn record, set by Bruno Brunod. My palms began to sweat just thinking about it, and my heart began to pound whenever I imagined attempting it one day. This was the starting point for the Summits of My Life project.

I chose seven summits I felt a special attraction to, either for the athletic challenge they would bring; for the history or the beauty of the mountain; for the problems I anticipated running into; or for the experience that, at the end of the day, would help me learn. I knew that on the mountain records draw the attention, and that these were always subject to the day’s conditions and the means used to set them. But I also knew that when all was said and done, all I would be left with were the memories and the knowledge of “how we did it.” With this in mind, I decided to write up a Values Statement where I established the guiding principles of the project that would keep us focused more on the “how” and less on the “what.”
These are the principles that have guided the Summits of My Life project:

1. Nobody told us who to be. Nobody told us to embark on this journey. Nobody told us it would be easy. Someone said that we are what we dream. If we don’t dream, we die. We will fight for our dreams and we will follow our passions, because we believe that the meaning of life lies not in following others’ footsteps, but in finding our own path to what we love. And, despite any difficulties, we learn from each misstep and press on.

2. We will follow the instinct that takes us toward the unknown. Taking risks is not like making a bet; it’s evolving and it’s changing each one of us. Being free is being ourselves, making our own decisions, not following anyone. It’s choosing: choosing to have a family, choosing a job, choosing a peak. On the mountain, we are the ones who trace our own path, the ones who decide whether we take this path or that one, whether we climb this peak or that one. Sometimes we do it and sometimes we don’t, but it’s up to us to make our own path where there is none.

3. We won’t look at the obstacles we’ve overcome, but the ones ahead. We should learn from our past without living in it; we should use the experience, respect, and fear that we’ve lived in order to build a solid future. The past isn’t the life that we should let define us. We will live each instant from the present, always looking at what lies ahead of us.

4. It’s not about being the fastest, strongest, or biggest. It’s about being ourselves. Human beings have shown that, with technology, we are capable of doing just about anything. But does that really matter? We need to learn to live with less, with only what we need to be fully human, the most integrated with the environment, with nature. Our power is in our feet, our legs, our bodies, and our minds.

5. We aren’t just runners, alpinists, or skiers. We aren’t just athletes. We are people. Shared emotions don’t add up; they multiply. A summit isn’t a geographic point, a date, and a time. Each summit is a warehouse of memories and emotions. It’s the people who accompanied us and those who waited for us at the bottom. We are all the people that we love and admire, those who go with us without ever being there.
We aren’t sure we’ll do it, but we are sure that we’ll find happiness.
Failure is not trying. Failure is not enjoying every step. Failure is not feeling. There will be thorns in the path, there’ll be pain, and there’ll be objectives that lie far off in the distance, but none of that is failure—not if we let the journey be what fills us up, even if we don’t make it to the top.

Simplicity is key.
We’re going to the mountain without aid, without assistance, without external help. We’re going humbly, without seeking to best the mountain because we know it will always be stronger, and we will go as far as it lets us. We’ll learn to live with the mountain, the very rocks themselves, the plants, and the ice—whatever lies underneath the surface, whatever was there before us and will continue on there after us.

We’ll go in silence.
We will make sure our journey goes unnoticed, that each trek leaves nothing more than our footprints that the wind will eventually erase. We carry our authentic selves within us, and it’s only in silence that we can begin to explore ourselves.

We’ll go with integrity.
There’s no helping hand to intervene when we’re in danger on the mountain, and there’s nobody to congratulate us each time we achieve what we set out to do. We can’t abandon the path because there is no path. Because hypocrisy doesn’t exist on the mountain. Because the mountain is simply the mountain. For better or for worse, we are all responsible for our own actions.

We’re always searching for something—is it life?
What is the meaning of any venture, of any journey, of life? Is it to achieve goals or make progress toward them? Is it to reach the horizon or discover the landscape we cross as we walk toward it? Is life the medal at the end of a race or the emotions and feelings that we keep inside as we go? We are forged in dreams and emotions.
With these guiding principles and our ways of seeing and experiencing the mountain—and a list of the summits we wanted to reach—we put together a small team of people to give shape to the Summits of My Life project, and we put it into action.

We’d only known each other for about a year, but from the first day Seb Montaz and I filmed together, I knew there was a strong connection between us, one where we didn’t have to talk to know what the other was thinking. We shared a way of thinking about the mountain and, in a way, the same spirit. He was the only person who could film this project. Through him I met Vivian Bru-chez, who introduced me that very year to what has since become one of my greatest passions. That November, with the first snow of winter, I got a message from him:

“I saw you were on Chardonnet yesterday. Did you check out the north face? Want to try and ski the Éperon Migot?”
We'd never been out together—we'd just shot some pictures of me running, and he'd filmed me skiing once—but I responded right away:

"Where should I meet you and when?"

That afternoon, I prepared some skis that were wider than the ones I normally competed with, and the next day Vivian and I carved down from the peak of Chardonnet and performed the first descent of the Migot Spur. He was right there with me as I began to figure out extreme skiing, and he's still there today. He showed me the technique and how to see the lines, but, more than anything, he shared with me a new way of traveling and of enjoying the mountain. And this is what Summits of My Life is all about: being open, exploring ourselves and finding new ways of life, learning and taking things in, and sharing and discovering together.
When I lived in the Chamonix Valley, one of my favorite ways to train was to ascend and descend Mont Blanc. It hit on both altitude and elevation change, and I could do it two or three times a week when the weather was nice. Despite this, I hadn’t yet made it to the summit. The highest summit I’d climbed at that point was Mount Kilimanjaro at 19,341 feet. For this reason, the “two Jordis” became key players in the project. They were Jordi Tosas and Jordi Corominas, two of the best alpinists ever to come out of Catalonia.

Tosas’s snowboard had been down Shivling and Cho Oyu, and his hands had climbed some of the toughest rock faces in the world. Coro had scaled K2’s Magic Line, opening up a new path in waist-deep snow all the way to the top, which he reached at midnight, before descending the other side. He’s still roping in the younger generation to go and open up untouched snow faces in the Andes and Himalayas. Without a doubt, I couldn’t have found better mentors to introduce me to the world of big mountains. And that’s just what happened when, in February 2012, they took me to discover the true immensity of the Himalayas in the best way possible: the three of us with nothing but what we could carry on our backs to take us far up and away, humble and completely isolated.

Stéphane Brosse, one of my childhood idols whom I tried to emulate when I began to compete, soon joined the group as well. After he left the competition circuit, he made an extraordinary career for himself in alpinism and extreme skiing. The two of us shared the same vision and way of experiencing the mountain: light, quick, and without assistance. This, and what we had learned in our pasts as competitors, brought us together.

It was this group of friends and I who decided in 2012 to dedicate ourselves to the Summits of My Life project.
Total ascent time: 74 hr., 8 min.

Mont Blanc Traverse
June 16, 2012

Mont Blanc
July 11, 2013

Innominata
September 18, 2012

August 21, 2013

September 20, 2013

June 7, 2014

Mont Blanc
15,781 ft.

Elbrus
20,310 ft.

Denali
20,310 ft.

The Matterhorn
18,510 ft.

Aconcagua
22,841 ft.

Total time:
Mont Blanc Traverse
16 hr.

Ascent time:
8 hr., 42 min.

Total ascent time:
74 hr., 8 min.

Total distance:
82.0 mi.

Mont Blanc
Total time:
16 hr.

Ascent time:
8 hr., 42 min.

Mont Blanc Traverse
Total time:
16 hr.

Ascent time:
8 hr., 42 min.

Total distance:
82.0 mi.

Denali
Total time:
11 hr., 48 min.

Ascent time:
9 hr., 45 min.

Total distance:
26.1 mi.

Aconcagua
Total time:
12 hr., 49 min.

Ascent time:
8 hr., 45 min.

Total distance:
33.2 mi.

Denali
Total time:
11 hr., 48 min.

Ascent time:
9 hr., 45 min.

Total distance:
26.1 mi.

The Matterhorn
Total time:
2 hr., 52 min.

Ascent time:
1 hr., 56 min.

Total distance:
18.6 mi.

Innominata
Total time:
8 hr., 42 min.

Ascent time:
6 hr., 17 min.

Total distance:
10.9 mi.

The Innominata
Total time:
8 hr., 42 min.

Ascent time:
6 hr., 17 min.

Total distance:
10.9 mi.

Mont Blanc
Total time:
16 hr.

Ascent time:
8 hr., 42 min.

Total distance:
37.2 mi.

Total distance:
37.3 mi.

Elbrus
Total time:
4 hr., 57 min.

Ascent time:
3 hr., 30 min.

Total distance:
17.7 mi.

Total distance:
18.6 mi.
Challenges met Attempts Elevation

Mont Blanc Traverse
- Total time: 16 hr.
- Ascent time: 8 hr., 42 min.

Aconcagua
- Total time: 12 hr., 49 min.
- Ascent time: 8 hr., 45 min.

Denali
- Total time: 11 hr., 48 min.
- Ascent time: 9 hr., 45 min.

The Innominate
- Total time: 8 hr., 42 min.
- Ascent time: 6 hr., 17 min.

Mount Everest
- Ascent time: 17 hr.

The Matterhorn
- Total time: 2 hr., 52 min.
- Ascent time: 1 hr., 56 min.

Mont Blanc
- Total time: 4 hr., 57 min.
- Ascent time: 3 hr., 30 min.

Aconcagua
- Total time: 12 hr., 49 min.
- Ascent time: 8 hr., 45 min.

The Innominate
- Total time: 8 hr., 42 min.
- Ascent time: 6 hr., 17 min.

Mount Everest
- Ascent time: 17 hr.

Mont Blanc Traverse
- Total time: 16 hr.
- Ascent time: 8 hr., 42 min.

Total time:
- 74 hr., 8 min.

Total distance:
- 82.0 mi.

10.9 mi.

26.1 mi.

18.6 mi.

33.2 mi.

37.3 mi.

37.2 mi.

37.3 mi.

26.1 mi.

18.6 mi.

10.9 mi.

Time

Ascent time:
- 57 min.
- 45 min.
- 49 min.
- 52 min.
- 30 min.
- 17 min.
- 45 min.
- 56 min.
- 30 min.
- 17 min.
- 57 min.
- 45 min.

Total time:
- 2 hr., 52 min.
- 1 hr., 56 min.
- 2 hr., 52 min.
- 1 hr., 56 min.
- 4 hr., 57 min.
- 3 hr., 30 min.
- 8 hr., 42 min.
- 6 hr., 17 min.
- 8 hr., 42 min.
- 6 hr., 17 min.
- 4 hr., 57 min.
- 3 hr., 30 min.
- 8 hr., 42 min.
- 6 hr., 17 min.
- 8 hr., 42 min.
- 6 hr., 17 min.

Ascent time:
- 17 hr.
- 57 min.
- 45 min.
- 52 min.
- 30 min.
- 17 min.
- 57 min.
- 45 min.
- 52 min.
- 30 min.
- 17 min.
- 57 min.
- 45 min.
- 52 min.
- 30 min.
- 17 min.
- 57 min.
- 45 min.
- 52 min.
- 30 min.
- 17 min.
- 57 min.
- 45 min.
- 52 min.
- 30 min.
- 17 min.
To take hold of the dreams of his youth and to experience the might and purity of the mountains, champion ultrarunner and mountaineer Kilian Jornet sets his sights on the ascent and descent records of the world’s most legendary peaks—Denali, Mont Blanc, Aconcagua, the Matterhorn, Elbrus, and even the mighty Everest—all without supplemental oxygen. Accompanied by close friends and personal heroes, Jornet shares in his own words and in breathtaking photographs what each mountain demands and ultimately offers in return.

Jornet’s passionate and ambitious quest makes it clear why National Geographic has twice named him an Adventurer of the Year. Summits of My Life is a five-year project that illuminates not only the spectacular beauty of the mountains but also the life-changing power of daring, loss, and dreams fulfilled.