

## Buxton Adventure Festival

## Squash's record-breaking mountain jump



PHOTO: MINDY, Photo: Andy Richardson

**DERBYSHIRE** adventurer and mountaineer Squash Faloutsos is appearing at the Pavilion Arts Centre in Buxton as part of the new Buxton Adventure Festival.

Last year Squash reached the summit of Mount Everest and stood on top of the world. But climbing the world's highest mountains isn't enough of a challenge for her. Instead of going back down the way she came up, she'd rather jump off the top.

More accurately, she turns off the top to launch her paraglider which she then gently manoeuvres and uses the winds of altitude down to the valley below.

Unfortunately the weather closed in and prevented her flying from the highest point on earth but she looked her place in the record books when she became the first British woman to fly from the top of Europe's highest peak, Mont Blanc.

It wasn't her first first - she also holds the dubious honour of being the world's highest ever 'bain douchette' - having reached up and soaked down the Ghyll (just 300m lower than Everest) on her bottom.

She is back from a trip up (and down) the 400m high Great Parosio in the Swiss Valley. The classic question

• Far from dreaming of being an adventurer as a child Squash actually wanted to be a farmer.

• She might be heavy enough to fly like a bird but has actually been scared of birds since she was attacked by a cockerel when she was three.

• She's called Squash because her sister couldn't say her real name 'Louise' so she started out as 'Louse' which became 'Louse', then Squashy Puss which was shortened to Squash.

is the thrill of parachuting that drives her? "The actual buzz of flying off a mountain is just an incredible, loaded (sic) feeling."

But she's not a mindless adrenaline junkie. Far from it. She says: "I think some people think I would do it and I'm quite sure but that's not the case. It absolutely frightens me but I can use those nerves conscientiously to focus my mind and concentrate on what I'm doing."

In fact Faloutsos claims that jumping off the top of a mountain is safer and safer than climbing down. "To be able to fly down is just a matter of training is just amazing. It took two days for me to climb Mont Blanc and just 20 minutes to fly down. Some people

ask but I'd argue it's the safe option, once you've got the take-off done. Most accidents happen on the way down because that's when you're at your most tired - you're very exposed, the weather can change and if you take forces to descend. Or at least that's what I tell my patients!"

She does admit that she's a natural extrovert and that on the day she was born she thinks someone must have removed the part of her brain that says, "You shouldn't do that, it's impossible!"

At a recent talk at Nottingham Girls' School she confessed to the students that she never had a big career path mapped out. It was a trip to the Alps at the age of 18 that inspired her.

She says: "In life you don't always know what you want to do and when you want to be but often you do know where you don't want to be and what you don't want to do. So sometimes you have to work backwards." But her advice is simple - do the things you're passionate about.

Securing sponsorship from local offshoots outdoor company Rab was a massive boost for her. "It makes all

the difference in the world. In the early days when I started working with Rab it was the biggest thing that had happened to me.

"Up there on Everest you need the best equipment available and Rab design and make that, so to be able to work with them and wear their kit was just fantastic."

Her next project is to try and help organise a spectacular mass flight from the top of Africa's highest peak - Mount Kilimanjaro. The aim is for 100 paragliders to fly from the summit to raise a million dollars for charity.

Though she travels all over the world, she says her heart's in Derbyshire and one of her favourite places for training runs to remain her home in right here in the Peak District at Ladybower Dam.

"It's amazing to come back home when I was out running it was a beautiful, well, crap day and I thought how lucky I was to be there. It's absolutely amazing, I love it."

You can hear Squash talk on Saturday October 25 at 11.30am. Tickets are £12 with refreshments, concessions and family tickets also available.



NEW CHALLENGE Squash Faloutsos