

LIVING THE DREAM?

Climb now; work later is DMM's famous motto. But what happens when a sticker slogan becomes your career plan? **Sarah Stirling** talks to seven sponsored stars to discover the graft behind the glamour.

Climbing's bohemian forefathers were young at a particularly boring time: after World War II had crushed the life out of everyone, but before the 60s started swinging. Before this, climbing was something mountaineers who had earned their beards did for training; now an adventurous few developed it into a way of life.

In that hedonistic epoch before the apple of commercialism had been bitten, most climbers knew each other, and tribes of them began coagulating around crags. It was inevitable the tantalising question would spark: how can we do this all the time, and never have to work?

In the beginning, the answer was simple: live rough, live now. As Gwen Moffat wrote: "I was a typical product of the war: impressionable and frustrated." Then she meets a Greek god in bell-bottoms, hard and golden at the foot of Cadair Idris, who opens up "a free and splendid world of mountain climbing", populated by "supermen and lovely, casual girls subject to no ordinary rules."

Meanwhile the Golden Age of Yosemite is beautifully depicted in the film *Valley Uprising*, in which Yvon Chouinard describes buying damaged cat food tins for the climbers living rough at Camp Four to eat: "None of us expected to ever have a job. We were going to be hobos basically. And we were going to climb forever and that was the extent of it."

Human nature meant things wouldn't stay simple, of course, and that Yosemite era ended with the Peter Pans wanting to grow up. In the 60s, Yvon Chouinard and several of his contemporaries turned their skilful hands and risk-taking minds to gear manufacture, setting up companies like Black Diamond and Royal Robbins. Even Gwen Moffat stopped skipping up climbs barefoot and became the first female British mountain guide.

Around this time, Chris Bonington was busy pioneering the 'professional climber' lifestyle we know today, too – earning money from sponsorship, writing and talking about his climbing.

"I didn't think it was possible to make a living from climbing at first," says



NICK BULLOCK

Nick Bullock is a prolific hard climber who has bagged many new routes across every discipline from Welsh trad to Scottish mixed, and alpine to expedition climbing.

My life is about testing myself, pursuing freedom and attempting to be happy. Although I make a living from climbing and then writing or talking about it, I wouldn't call myself a 'professional climber' because to me that word connects to regulation and conformism.

I battle against the trap of being paid for what I do constantly. Time is the most valuable possession I have, and my only real pay-master. Freedom to pursue a passion is the greatest wage.

Worst day scenario? I don't have one. I have no fixed abode, so sometimes use club huts, and when I want peace and quiet to write this can be difficult, but it's a minor niggle. At the end of the day I am not living in poverty or wondering if I will be bombed in the night.

Pension plan? I don't really have one, but the way things are going, I'm not sure anyone who has paid into one in Britain will have one, either. I came to climbing after working almost full-time for 20 years, so I had already paid off the mortgage on my terrace house. I rent it out, which provides income and something of a security blanket for the future.

As well as making money from writing, I do some work for my sponsors – generally in the form of giving lectures. They provide me with all the kit I need, and two of them also pay me a small retainer. This modest income combined with paying no rent allows me to live exceptionally comfortably because I don't feel a need to buy things, unless I really need them.

I'm not smug about this: I'm genuinely concerned for people who have slaved away only to be let down in their old age. It really scares me to think I could have gone on working hard doing something I did not enjoy for a large part of my life only to realise that I had worked for a deception.

If I had remained a PE Instructor in the prison, I probably wouldn't have had the motivation, time or fitness to go from one type of climb to the next – Scottish mixed to trad, sport to alpine, Greater Ranges to ice – in short time periods as I do now.

I know that not everyone can follow their passions – that many in the world can only hope for the next meal – but if you can, find yours and follow it, be it needle-craft or brain-surgery, and then try hard to not worry too much, or be embarrassed about failure, it's trying and being content that's the most important.

Whatever you do, whatever path, as they say, you take, or whatever job you have to undertake, if you are honest and focus on compassion and understanding, then your life and the people in it will be happier.

Nick Bullock is sponsored by Mountain Equipment, Boreal and DMM.

**"TIME IS THE MOST VALUABLE
POSSESSION I HAVE, AND MY ONLY
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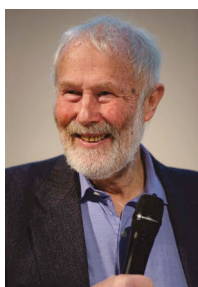
➤ Chris, who spent ten years in the army. Then, in 1961, he was invited on a civilian expedition to Nuptse. “The army wouldn’t let me go,” he told me, “so I resigned.” Afterwards, he got a job with Unilever, and was then invited on another expedition. “Uni-lever wouldn’t let me go,” he continues, “so I resigned.”

After this, Chris began scratching a tenner-a-time lecturing at ladies luncheons. When the Telegraph asked him to photograph the first British expedition to climb the Eiger’s North Wall, it was a chance foot-in-the-door to photo-journalism. In those techno-dark ages, he would walk a mile to the nearest phone, reverse the charges, and dictate his climbing stories to the press.

After successfully leading an expedition to climb the south-west of Everest, Chris began starring in TV adverts – who can forget this line: “We boiled up snow and ice to make hot, strong Bovril to thaw ourselves out. How that beefy taste cheered us” – and became one of the world’s first sponsored climbers, signed to Berghaus – a two-man band based out of a Newcastle shop. Several decades later, he’s now a non-executive chairman of a global brand.

The number of ‘sponsored climbers’ gleaming from brands’ adverts – dangling confidently from huge glorious cliffs while the paparazzi snap away admiringly – has multiplied exponentially since then. However, behind the scenes lies a precarious paradox: Chris would never have climbed Everest unless he’d committed to this risky climber’s lifestyle, yet it wasn’t until he’d climbed that mountain that his career took off.

In order to attract sponsorship, you need to be significantly pushing the cutting-edge of climbing. Achieving this is a full-time job in itself – especially now that you also need to be a self-marketing whiz with a ready-made fan-base already



Chris Bonington: the original pro climber.

PHOTO: BONINGTON COLLECTION.

intruding on your every route, meal and thought. All this forces wannabees to commit to a move away from a regular career long before they know if they will actually reach the top.

Most sponsored climbers struggle with that rather dashing title, anyway, because it implies that they actually make a living from it. As Steve McClure confesses: “99% of climbers get about as much free stuff as they could buy with a week’s wages stacking shelves at a corner shop.” There just isn’t the money in climbing that there is in football, skiing or surfing, yet, so not everyone can muscle in and become a national treasure like Bonners, Sharma or Ondra.

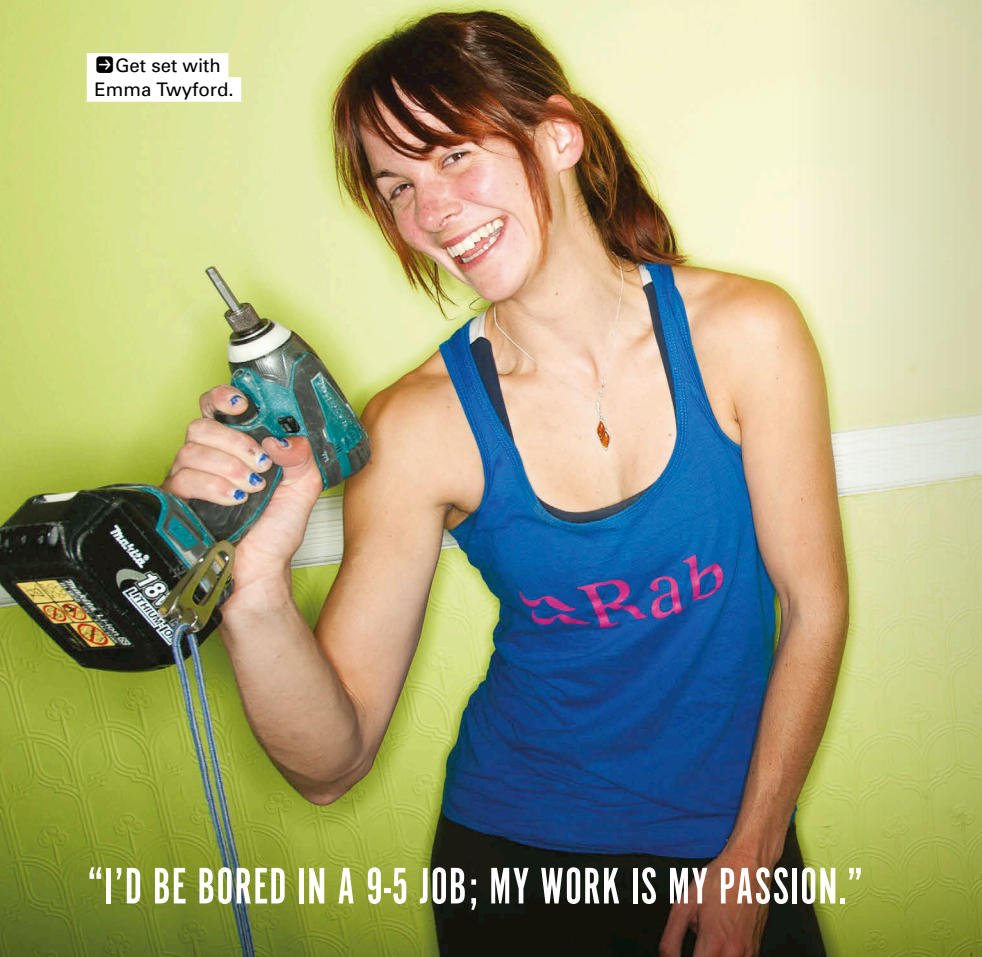
So how do sponsored heroes achieve their dreams, if they’re not paid to climb full-time, and yet can’t afford the time required to hold down a proper job, either?

Climbing full-time is harder now than it was 20 years ago, when sponsorship was “available direct from the dole office,” quips Steve. “Though that did require tolerance for 10p beans and sleeping in a woodshed.” These days the best way to reach full-time status is to buy a van and laptop, then “leave your job prospects in the gutter,” he laughs.

His words call to mind a slack and carefree life, yet the truth is far from it. “Steve works like a dog!” says his contemporary, Lucy Creamer. As well as holding onto his position at the top of British sport climbing, Steve is a routesetter, coach, lecturer, landlord, staff trainer, team manager, writer and a father. “I love cramming stuff in!” explains Steve, who often travels by train to fit in an extra admin-sesh.

He’s not the only one. Behind today’s range of sponsored heroes lie an inventive range of side jobs. They are testament to their ingenuity and determination, and reflecting on their

➤ Get set with Emma Twyford.



“I’D BE BORED IN A 9-5 JOB; MY WORK IS MY PASSION.”

EMMA TWYFORD

One of Britain’s very best female climbers, Emma has flashed both E7 and F8a, head-pointed E9 and redpointed F8b+/c.

In my time I’ve managed cafes and worked in climbing walls, but three years ago I decided to take the leap into routesetting and coaching in order to have a more flexible lifestyle. I’m one of a handful of female setters and it takes me all over the country. It’s physically demanding and makes it hard to train specifically, but, mostly, I love it!

Coaching is a side job. At the moment I often coach groups at walls after setting, but ideally I would like to put more time into advertising it. I also do the occasional day of work for sponsors, which might be giving a factory tour, coaching or talking to shop staff about kit.

My work keeps me fit, so my base level for climbing has gone up in recent years. I can also go on more trips because I’m my own boss, and choose when I work to a certain extent, though saying ‘no’ is sometimes hard.

I love it when setting problems goes smoothly with creativity flowing, and when it comes to testing them

ANDY HOUSEMAN

Andy Houseman has been on many expeditions to the Greater Ranges, from Alaska to the Himalaya, and was nominated for the Piolet d'Or for a new route on Chang Himal.

My family business is predominantly haulage – driving trucks – so this and my climbing are completely contrasting. When I tell climbers what I do for work they say: “You do what?!” and when I tell work colleagues about my climbing, they say: “You do what?!”

After graduating, I spent my summers working for dad, driving trucks, working in the yard and running the transport. The others could have made my life difficult – the bosses’ son – but we have a really good bunch of lads so it was always good fun.

In my other life, I spent winter seasons in Chamonix from 2004 to 2011. My first time on a proper mountain was in Alaska in 2007 with Jon Bracey, who I’d met in the Alps. It really opened my eyes. I realised that I can push myself and am good at suffering. We made the second ascent of the French route on Mt Hunter. A lot of strong teams had tried it before, and not much was known about the route. Since then I’ve been away on an expedition every year for around 5-6 weeks.

Dad has been very supportive. There were never any hand-outs but he gave me a full-time job every time I came back from the mountains. There was never any pressure to take over the family business, but I always knew he would love it if I did. A lot of people wouldn’t, but I get on well working with my dad.

When I was doing seasons transfer driving in Chamonix, I missed working on the family business, and realised there must be a reason why I kept coming back. I started training to be a mountain guide in 2011, but realised it wasn’t for me. I was just doing it so I could be in Chamonix. So I moved back to Yorkshire full-time. Dad’s a workaholic. He won’t retire, but he’s taking it a bit easier now, which is why I have to be there more.

We’re now developing the yard into a business park and doing more contract hire, vehicle leasing and warehousing now, under the name E Houseman and Son Ltd. The work is really varied: I might be out in the workshop welding, in the office, or my latest project is building a biomass heating system.

When I see photos of Chamonix on Facebook I think maybe I should have become a guide! It’s hard to train for big mountains in Yorkshire. In Chamonix you can do 1,000m vertical and get the lift down before work. Here, I might find a 250m hill in the Dales and do reps on it! I run, bike, and do a lot of gym stuff now.

However, I actually really enjoy my contrasting passions of work and climbing. Because I don’t climb all year, I’m more productive when I do. There’s also incentive to put effort in because I’m investing in the future. But no matter what job I did I like to think I’d be psyched for it – I enjoy working. But then I’ve never had a job where I worked for someone else.

Everybody leads their own lives; you have to do what’s right for you. I didn’t intend to have a stable career. I’m very lucky I do enjoy it.

individual characters, but ultimately designed to offer the same thing: allowing them to keep fit and strong while giving them the free-time to run for the crags and mountains.

Scottish Winter hero Greg Boswell, for example, used to be a farm hand. Now he builds underwater tractors. Emma Twyford, probably Britain’s hardest trad-cracking woman, is a routesetter. Mina Leslie-Wujastyk teaches yoga part-time. Piolet d’Or nominee Andy Houseman used to drive lorries. Hard man and esteemed author Nick Bullock lives in his van.

What’s it really like to build a career out of your passion? “A bit of me ponders whether I should get a proper job on a daily basis,” says Emma Twyford. “I see friends settled down with kids and a house and think, I have none of that.”

Greg Boswell, meanwhile, is more laissez-faire: “My thoughts on the idea that I should get a stable career with a pension plan are very minimal at the moment. You only live once, right?”

What advice can Chris Bonington offer, looking back on his career from the comfort of the position he’s climbed to at Berghaus?

“I think one should do what one passionately wants to,” he reflects. “You may have to spread yourself over a wide area, be a mild opportunist, work bloody hard and be aware that it can be extremely uncertain. But if you like climbing you quite like uncertainty anyway!”

He could be describing a climbing expedition, I reflect, as I smile and write his answer down. It’s clearly no coincidence that our sponsored heroes are exploring routes into the unknown, both on the rock and generally, in terms of building a life around your passion. Who knows what the next generation will reveal to be possible? 🏔️

you don’t need to make many changes. Then I feel proud of the routes I’ve set. Sometimes the opposite happens though. I enjoy coaching when I feel that clients are getting good information out of me and enjoying the day. Worst day scenario is an expectation that you are immediately going to change someone’s climbing in a group session. There’s no magic wand – only hard work!

A bit of me ponders whether I should get a proper job on a daily basis. I see friends settled down with kids and a house and think: “I have none of that”. If I did have kids it would be difficult to carry on doing this job, too. On the other hand, I’d be bored in a 9-5 job; my work is my passion. I’ve worked hard to make a name for myself in setting, and I love creating routes that people enjoy.

My advice to anyone thinking about making a living around climbing would be: don’t close potential doors. I’m glad I went to uni but it’s now much more expensive, so it’s worth exploring every avenue before deciding. Follow your heart and your passions. There are plenty of other avenues around climbing, but with any of them you have to be savvy, passionate and confident at selling yourself.

Emma is sponsored by Rab, Fiveten and DMM.

PHOTO: ALEX MESSENGER



“I DIDN’T INTEND TO HAVE A STABLE CAREER. I’M VERY LUCKY I DO ENJOY IT.”

Andy Houseman is sponsored by Adidas Eyewear, Black Diamond, Scarpa, The North Face and Tendon Ropes.

GREG BOSWELL

Scottish winter climber Greg Boswell has carved a niche right at the cutting edge of the sport. Last year he made the first ascent of Banana Wall, the second Scottish XII.

I used to work as a farm hand just down the road from where I live in North Fife. I did everything from driving tractors in the fields to building and restoring old sheds; it was super-varied. My worst day scenario was sitting in a tractor all day at a slow speed working a field. My best days were spent fencing, building or chopping wood. I like working when I'm getting some physical training, too.

The pay wasn't great, but there were always a lot of hours on offer, so if I was willing to put in the time the pay cheque wasn't too bad at the end of the month. I also do a bit of work for my sponsors throughout the year, like staff training in shops, as well as slideshows and talks now and again to try to inspire, put my climbing stories out there and put a little more fuel in the van.

It was a great job because my boss was super-understanding about giving me time off at the drop of a hat to go into the mountains if the conditions were good, but last March I decided to have a change from the usual springtime farm routine. I started working on Utility Remotely Operated Vehicles (UTROV), building sort of subsea tractors that dangle off the back of ships, and are controlled by wires with electricity and fibre-optic cables running through them. At first I was part-time in the work-shop using machinery skills I'd learnt from farm work but I've since helped build two full ROV systems. The work involves everything from welding, grinding and assembling, to design and testing, and lots of work with hydraulics, fibre optics and high-voltage electricity. It's quite physical work, and there is lots of stuff I can train with at lunchtimes and after work – everything in a subsea engineering workshop is usually designed to sink, so it's heavy!

I usually try to work a lot over the summer and take the winter off to make the most of the colder months, which has provided me with some pretty good adventures over the years. My thoughts on the idea that I should get a stable career with a pension plan are very minimal at the moment. You only live once, right?

My advice to younger climbers thinking of making a living out of it is: don't stress too much about going to uni or getting a full-time job if you don't think it's for you. But equally don't just sit around doing nothing, go down the local wall every night and think that will eventually make you a living as a full-time climber. You have to really work for it if you want to make money doing something you love. There is a career in there for everyone – you just have to find it.

If you work hard enough, then, yeah, I definitely think it's possible to be a full-time sponsored climber. But it is not easy and for most people there won't be loads of money in it, so most sponsored climbers have a climbing-orientated job, too. Guiding is the obvious one, but the list is endless.

At the moment, I'm just taking it one step at a time and working hard to try and make my career out of climbing. I'm focusing solely on this as it is my dream and I won't do it if I don't give it my all. My parents support me 100%. They're happy for me to do what I love, and they know I'd be suicidal if I worked in an office.

Greg is sponsored by Scarpa, Grivel, Deuter, Rab, Suunto, Lorpen, Skitrab and Terra Nova.

"YOU HAVE TO REALLY WORK FOR IT IF YOU WANT TO MAKE MONEY DOING SOMETHING YOU LOVE."



Greg: building subsea tractors.



Greg Boswell: balancing work and play.

PHOTO: ALEX MESSENGER.



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WILL SIM

From single-pushing Denali's Cassin Ridge in under 15 hours to climbing over 20 Grandes Courses, Will is a fast-and-light machine.

I used to work on a dairy farm in West Cumbria where I grew up. I'd milk and feed 120 cows twice a day, then build and fix things from fences to bits of machinery, or perhaps help deliver a calf. I could be more knackered after a day on the farm than after a day's guiding.

Winter on the farm could be pretty bad, out in the cold and rain all day, up to your knees in shit. The cows are inside in the winter, which means their sheds need cleaning out and hundreds of tonnes of slurry to spread every day. On really bad days everything breaks, all your time is spent fixing things and the real jobs never get done. It also hurts a lot when you get kicked or stood on.

Summer on the farm could be a real joy, though, out in a field with the radio on, doing something creative like building a fence or wall in the sun. The cows would all be out in the fields, too, meaning no spreading slurry.

I've also made money through other climbing-related stuff, like lecturing, but pennies. I have worked with sponsors for some time, who make my lifestyle much more affordable and expeditions more possible.

The benefit of working on the farm was that I could head off with little notice. This isn't a reflection of working in farming per se, more to do with my boss being a really nice guy.

When you get older, inevitably and regrettably, money can become more important. So far, it's held no more importance for me than to put diesel in my van and buy flights to go on climbing trips, but when I'm older I'll want more stability. Although I love climbing all the time, I also started to crave an actual career that I could call my own, something other than being a professional bum. Guiding gives me that, and I'm excited by the idea of having a vocation.

I wouldn't have been able to do all the big trips and pack in the climbing

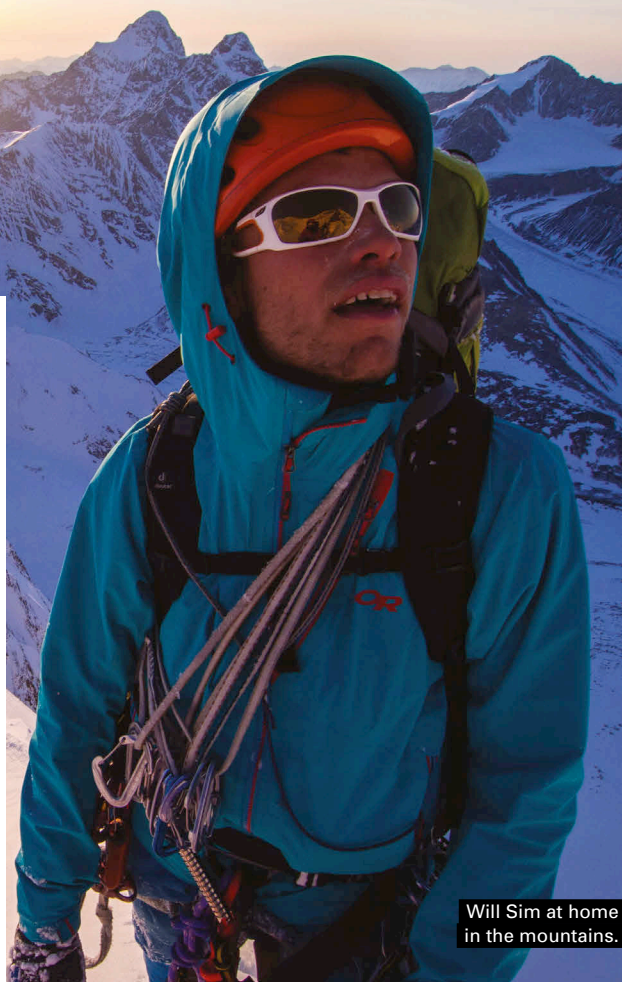


PHOTO: JON GRIFFITH.

mileage on big remote mountains if I'd gone to uni. Some people would have you believe that uni is the only route to a career, but I think a 'proper job' is any job. For most people, going to uni is just the easiest thing you can do when you're 18.

My advice to anyone thinking of making a living out of climbing is just go climbing. You'll soon realise that there are a load of professions you could get into that pay well and give loads of time off. There's the odd exception, but being a professional climber hasn't got as much to do with climbing as you might think, more to do with having an adept understanding of social media, being good at networking and having a good public persona.

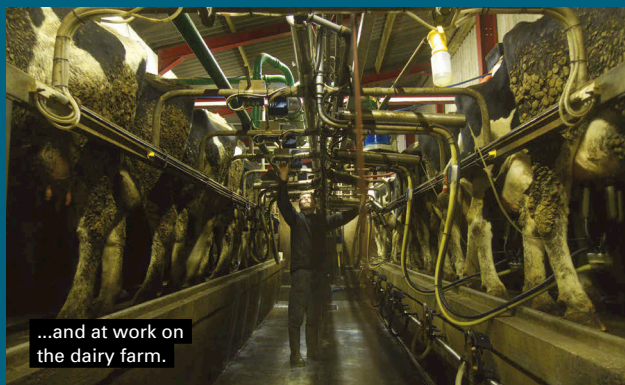
I think living off sponsorship alone is possible, but it's pretty frugal and there's only room for a handful of people. It's not money for nothing either: it's a job, like being a builder, and it might last a few years but sooner or later you're probably going to have to get another one.

One of the world's most accomplished alpine climbers once said to me, "I've won the Piolet d'Or twice, been on an expedition to a cutting-edge objective every year for the last 20, and I've never been approached by a sponsor." That's because he doesn't have a blog, a Twitter account, bug people until they write articles about him, or slink around at trade shows in a tight top and cool sunglasses.

Most of the amazing climbers I admire and think are truly talented aren't professional climbers and don't make any money in the climbing world.

Will is sponsored by Grivel, Outdoor Research and Scarpa.

"I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO ALL THE BIG TRIPS AND PACK IN THE CLIMBING MILEAGE IF I'D GONE TO UNI."



STEVE McCLURE

Steve McClure has climbed the hardest sport route in the UK at 9a+, numerous new routes at the grade of 9a and onsighted many at 8b+.

At the moment I'm climbing Mondays, routesetting Tuesdays, doing admin Wednesdays, coaching Fridays, then it's Saturday some other work: maybe writing, lecturing, team management, staff training or house maintenance (I'm also a landlord). I spend Sunday with the family! My routine changes all the time, but the main thing is, it's flexible.

I love cramming stuff in. A trip to London might involve two-hours of admin on the train, routesetting 10-7, coaching 7-10, then next day setting 8-6, training at the wall 6-8, and another admin session on way home. If I can fit something else in, even better!

I spent seven years as a design engineer at a desk. I liked it and was pretty good at it. My job was stable and, in a way, good fun. But not very flexible, and with only five weeks holiday it was tricky. There was no way I could do the climbing I wanted to. Imagine how long a limestone project that takes 15 days would take to work if you only had weekends? I'd never have managed most of my hard routes. I packed in my proper job at 31 years old, which coincided with my climbing taking off.

I have no pension, but I bought two houses in Sheffield ages ago for 14K each. They earn me £300 quid a month each and now the mortgage

is paid off. My job is totally unstable really, but then no 'proper' job is stable really? My missus is a 9-5 IT software developer, but there is always talk of redundancy.

My advice to young people wanting to make a living out of climbing is: don't pour everything into climbing. Get educated. You'll need it. Don't forget the guys in big companies will be educated, and they need to see you are clever and easy to work with. If you have no education and you fall out with climbing for whatever reason, you'll have no back up. I know 45-year-old climbers now taking GSCE exams because they didn't do them when younger.

It's possible to make a career out of climbing. There are many choices. But you need to put in the work, because there aren't that many jobs to go around. When I first started setting I did it for free, then for a low rate until I got a reputation. It took years to get going.

My parents were stressed when I packed in a good engineering job – my dad was a solid engineer for 40 years – but he can see it's worked out for me. He's seen my talks, read my book, seen magazine columns, climbed my routes and they're now psyched about my life.

Steve is sponsored by Beal, Five Ten, Marmot, Petzl and Rockcity.



"I PACKED IN MY PROPER JOB AT 31 YEARS OLD, WHICH COINCIDED WITH MY CLIMBING TAKING OFF."



Mina climbing the classic Mecca (8c) at Raven Tor in the Peak District.

PHOTO: NIAL WESSENER

MINA LESLIE-WUJASTYK

Mina is one of a handful of British women to have ticked 8c, and one of our most successful boulderers.

I'm primarily a professional climber: I work with outdoor brands as an ambassador for their products and marketing, but I'm also a yoga teacher and co-owner of Unity Yoga Sheffield.

I love both these jobs and they work really well together. Climbing is my absolute passion but I'm also grateful to have a pursuit outside of it. Yoga really helps my climbing, in terms of flexibility, strength, injury prevention and on a mental level; and teaching gives me a creative outlet.

I love my work so don't have many bad days. When I'm in an intense training phase for climbing it can be hard to teach yoga the same day, because physical exhaustion makes it hard to focus. Equally there are days when I'm supposed to train and I'm really tired and just want to lie on my face.

Best day scenario? Being on a climbing trip and going out climbing. Or when someone in my yoga class has a breakthrough of some kind. I'm self-employed so the pay varies depending on where I teach. I've recently started up a yoga studio with two friends, which will hopefully provide us with more security.

I think the phrase 'proper job' is a huge deterrent to people who may want to explore work outside the mainstream. Lots of people are self-employed nowadays and doing amazing, creative and inspiring things. Yes, it lacks the stability of other choices but we don't know what the future holds anyway, and we can't always control it. I prefer to live for now, with maybe some loose plans for later.

The highlights of my life have been travelling the world and climbing in loads of amazing places. Having the opportunity to train hard to test myself on climbs that mean a lot to me. The longer trips abroad would have been near-impossible with standard annual leave allowances.

My advice to anyone thinking of building a career around climbing is: going to university can be a great way to go climbing more. Sheffield University was where it all changed for me.

I used to constantly worry that I wasn't contributing to society enough, that my endeavours were too selfish and that it was silly anyway to climb rocks for a living. I've realised that it's not silly: outdoor lifestyles are healthy and if I can help to inspire and promote them that's not a bad thing. I follow many athletes and live vicariously through them and it brings me great inspiration and motivation.

Standards are high nowadays but it's totally doable to be a full-time professional climber. Part and parcel of that role are things like events, talks, writing, so it's not just about the climbing. And there are many ways to supplement that income with things like routesetting and coaching.

The thing with sponsorship is that it takes time to build a relationship with a brand. Unless you're the next Ashima, they aren't going to offer you tons of cash straight up. In my experience it starts with gear and progresses from there with time. So it's worth going to university and don't quit the part-time job straight away...

Mina is sponsored by Arc'teryx, Fiveten, Organic Climbing, Element Chiropractic Clinic, Beta Climbing Designs and Pulsin' snack bars.

"THE PHRASE 'PROPER JOB' IS A HUGE DETERRENT TO PEOPLE WHO MAY WANT TO EXPLORE WORK OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM."

Seven-times British champion Lucy Creamer was also the first British woman to climb E8 and 8b+. She disappeared from the scene in her prime with a bad shoulder injury from 2009 to 2013, followed by a broken leg. Last year she burst back on the scene onsighting 8as.

Earlier this year, a climber I was belaying fell off, ripped all his gear and landed on me, breaking my back. I've also got niggly shoulders and dodgy elbows. I can't climb at an elite level the way I want to any more, and that's only going to get worse, so I decided to retrain in the health service.

I've done lots of rope access and coaching over the years, amongst other things like work for sponsors. Doing another job connected to climbing would be an obvious move, but I found I didn't want to. I always thought if I wasn't a climber, I'd need an outdoor job as I'm a physical person. However, I've recently been inspired by people who have full-on jobs and still travel the world and have a nice lifestyle. The whole world apparently doesn't end if you have a full-time job, which is what I used to think.

I love hospitals. I've been in hospital a lot, and I really enjoy the experience and get off on the atmosphere. So I thought, why not work in one? I did some research and came across Operating Department Practice. There are three different roles within that job: working with the anaesthetist, helping the surgeon and looking after the patient. You can specialise or do all of three. It sounded perfect. If I'd known about

**"A CLIMBER I WAS BELAYING FELL OFF,
RIPPED ALL HIS GEAR AND LANDED ON ME,
BREAKING MY BACK."**

LUCY CREAMER

this job 10-15 years ago I think I'd have gone for it then.

Unfortunately you need to do a degree, all NHS bursaries are coming to an end this year, and I don't have A-levels. So this year I'm doing an access course. It's exciting and scary and committing: four years of poverty in the hope that I do pass it all and get the qualifications. It's like when you try to climb a route, you don't know you can do it, but you hope you can, and you leave the ground and you try.

The pros of building a life around climbing were that I had loads of time to climb and could really commit to it. The cons were not having much money – I don't have many worldly possessions or own a house.

It's feeling bittersweet at the moment as it's still quite scary, and so different from how I've lived my whole adult life. I've always been able to climb when I wanted to and pick and choose when I work. Now I'm being dictated to by the NHS.

I guess I'm living proof that you can do anything you want at any time in your life. I think you should do what you want when it feels right.

I'm probably proudest of the hard trad onsighting that I've done. I don't think I would have been able to achieve that if I had been working full-time because you can't cut corners with trad. You need to put the hours in to be fit, strong and have a good head. I can look back now and see I've fulfilled my physical potential. Now I'm over my physical peak, which is very upsetting but true, I'm glad I made the most of what I had.

Lucy is sponsored by Marmot, DMM, Scarpa and Organic Pads.

PHOTO: TIM GLASBY



Lucy Creamer in hospital.

PHOTO: TIM GLASBY



Lucy Creamer fights her way up Point Blank (E8 6c), Stennis Ford, Pembroke in July 2015 – three years after a shoulder operation and before her latest accident.