



TR

MEETING THE REAL KILIAN JORNET

WORDS JOSH GALE
PHOTOS JORDI SARAGOSSA



**Suunto ambassador and
2014 National Geographic
Adventurer of the Year, Kilian
Jornet has won hundreds of
long distance running and
ski mountaineering races in**

the last decade. We met the man behind the headlines in Chamonix, France to find out what makes him tick.

Standing at the top of Aiguille du Midi, a 3800 m mountain in the French Alps, six-time Skyrunning World Series champion Kilian Jornet points out the peaks that have become his backyard playground.

The snow-covered flanks of the highest mountain in the Alps, 4809 m Mont Blanc, are catching the early afternoon sunshine to the south. As part of his 'Summits of my Life' project, Jornet broke the FKT (fastest known time) record up and down Mont Blanc by 13 minutes. The aim of the project is to set speed records on the planet's most famous mountains, and he has only two left on his list; Mount Elbrus and Everest. The Matterhorn, Aconcagua, Kilimanjaro, Denali – he has set FKTs on them all.



Jornet points further into the distance to Grandes Jorasses, a 4000 m peak famous for its formidable north face. He and a friend ran from Chamonix to the base, climbed it and then came down the other side, in one day. It's this kind of mixed adventure that really excites him. "Every sport is a tool," he says. "Running is a tool,

climbing is a tool, skiing is a tool, paragliding is a tool. The interesting thing is to say, 'I have this, this and this tool; what can I do with all them together'?"

Jornet himself dominates the elite level competition of two sports – ski mountaineering in winter and trail running in summer. What's also remarkable is that he is accomplished in all distances, from short 1 km vertical sprints to mountain marathons and ultras up to 280 km long.

His eyes sparkled like an alpine lake, revealing the typical mental clarity of someone who spends most of his life in the purity of the outdoors.

When I met him earlier that day in Chamonix, his home base for the last five years, he offered a shy handshake and looked slightly nervous. Snatches of thick black hair poked out the sides of his beanie. His eyes sparkled like an alpine lake, revealing the typical mental clarity



of someone who spends most of his life in the purity of the outdoors. Also typical for a man most at home above the tree line; he's not one for small talk.

On the cable car ride up Aiguille du Midi and on the viewing platforms, tourists recognized the rock star athlete and asked to have their photo taken with him. He obliged graciously each time, but said over



lunch that when it happens too often it starts to stress him out.

“I’m not really a social person,” he says. “There’s a lot of noise in society and it’s important to spend time alone in the wilderness to be away from it. I could easily be alone for one month and I wouldn’t miss anything. For me, a good balance is 70 per cent of the time silence and 30 per cent with people.”

If you want to keep Kilian Jornet's attention, talk to him about trail running, training and racing. But if you want him to wax lyrical, ask him about his philosophy on the wilderness and mountains. I did over lunch that day, and he paraphrased a quote from Russian alpinist Anatoli Bukareev. "Mountains are not the stadiums where I practice my sport or increase my ego, but they are the cathedrals where I practice my religion," he said. "I think sport and racing are interesting because you learn so much about yourself and find your limits but it's true that mountains are not a stadium. They offer much more than that. I think mountains are like a big mirror. You can look into your fears, into yourself, and who you are."

"I think mountains are like a big mirror. You can look into your fears, into yourself, and who you are."

It's no surprise he has a spiritual outlook on mountains when you consider his



upbringing. His father, Eduard Jornet, was a mountain guide and the hut warden of Cap de Rec, the hut in the Pyrenees where Kilian and his sister Nalia grew up. Jornet says his father had a “very romantic view of the mountains”. His mother, Núria Burgada, is a teacher and a quiet-natured person who instilled in her two children a deep connection with the natural world and taught them to be responsible for their actions.

“Extended family and social interaction are important in Spain, but our family wasn’t really like that because we lived in a mountain hut,” he says. “It wasn’t a normal childhood – it was a bit hippy-like.”

Instead, the people Jornet interacted with were the types that visit mountain huts: hikers, mountaineers and skiers. His parents had a library full of books by the world’s great alpinists and he devoured them. Jornet climbed his first 4000 m mountain, the Breithorn in Switzerland, when he was six years old. At age 12, he did a 150 km cycling race. A year later he entered the Ski Mountaineering Technical Centre where he met his mentors who taught him how to be independent in the mountains and how to train systematically.

Jornet climbed his first 4000 m mountain when he was six years old.

“I became obsessed with training,” Jornet says. “My trainer would say I should do

three hours one day, but I would bike two hours there, train for three hours and then cycle back. "I was in my own world. All I could think about was racing and training."

As he has become more confident with his abilities after winning countless ultra running and ski mountaineering titles around the world, Jornet's outlook on adventure sport has gradually transformed. Once focused on systematic training, he now approaches it intuitively. While he still enjoys competition, he's more inspired by creating new challenges like mixed adventures to test all the tools in his kit.

After lunch, he takes me back to his house in La Tour where he lives with his girlfriend Emelie Forsberg, also a Suunto ambassador and a skyrunning world champion. Jornet and I talk on the couch while she busily prepares for a camping trip they're going on that night. Beyond the racing, the mixed adventures, what



Jornet and Forsberg both share is an abiding love for simply being in the mountains. For Jornet, mountains are “living beings” and in the same way it takes time to get to know a person, he says understanding a mountain also takes time.

But, at this point, my time is up. I notice Jornet looking slightly nervous again. The 30 percent time allocation has finished. The mountains are calling. So I say my farewells and leave them to do what they love most.