

ULTRA RUNNER



CHRISTY MAHON

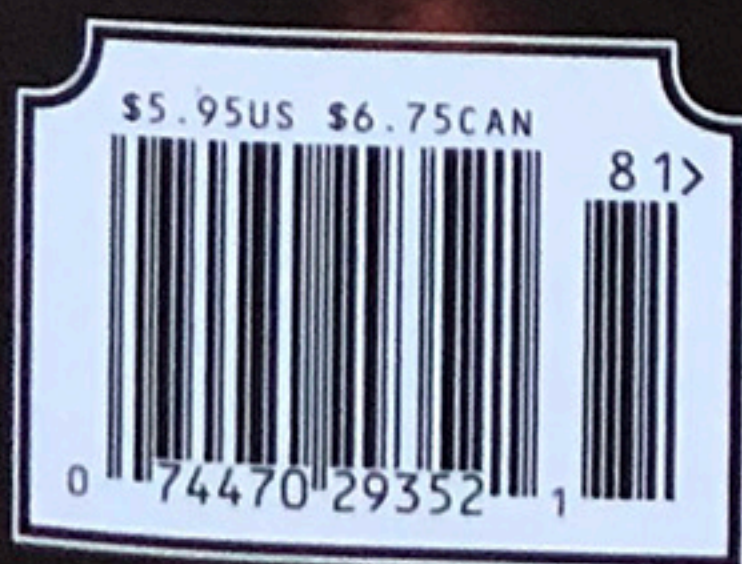
# biglife

MOUNTAIN LIFE AT ITS BEST

9


PLACES FOR  
YOUR NEXT  
ADVENTURE  
**SKIING  
ICELAND**  
HUNTING FOR  
ANTLERS

ART & EVENTS  
AROUND THE WEST  
KETCHUM, IDAHO  
THE TOWN WE LOVE  
FEELING SAUCY?  
BEST SAUCES FOR  
ONE-BOWL MEALS



**SPRING HAS SPRUNG**  
RIDE YOUR BIKE. CLIMB A MOUNTAIN. PLAY IN THE DIRT.  
GET LOST IN ORDER TO BE FOUND. REPEAT AS NECESSARY.



A full-page photograph of a desert canyon. A runner, Christy Mahon, is seen from behind, running on a dirt path that winds through the canyon. The canyon walls are made of reddish-brown sandstone, with a prominent spire on the left. The sun is shining brightly from the upper right, creating a starburst effect and casting long shadows. The sky is a clear, deep blue.

words by ANNIE POKORNY • photography by TED MAHON

# SLOWING DOWN

*with Christy Mahon*

THIS PAGE: National Geographic's 2015 Adventurer of the Year, Christy Mahon running in the desert.



**TODAY'S ADVENTURE WORLD CELEBRATES "BIGGER, FASTER, HARDER." ADVENTURER AND WRITER CHRISTY MAHON USES TRAIL RUNNING TO SHOW WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOU PRIORITIZE SMALLER, SLOWER, SOFTER.**

**I**n the late 1990s, a 20-year-old newly-minted park ranger sat on a log to breathe in the air amidst the dense, mossy woods of Washington's Olympic National Forest. On a solo backpacking trip, she felt wrapped in the humid green of the forest, her head spinning with the lists, dreams, and potentialities that fuel the days of 20-somethings out to change the world. The afternoon light shot through the forest ceiling, sending illuminating orange rays through the verdant aisles of trees. In that moment, stillness took hold of her. Quiet cut through the sounding board of her brain. The yeses, nos, ups, downs of her world dissipated as the density of the forest lay down a palpable blanket of peace.

This many years later, that former 20-year-old park ranger, Christy Mahon, says, "I remember thinking that for the first time, I felt real." Today, AN ASPEN-BASED ADVENTURE ATHLETE, MAHON HAS AN IMPRESSIVE LIST OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT INCLUDE BEING NAMED NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S ADVENTURER OF THE YEAR IN 2015 (WITH HER TWO MOUNTAINEERING PARTNERS, HER HUSBAND TED MAHON AND CHRIS DAVENPORT) AND BEING THE FIRST WOMAN TO SKI EVERY 14ER IN COLORADO. Looking back on that day in Olympic National Park, Mahon says, "In that moment in the woods, I knew that no matter how wild my life might become, that slow silence was something I could always return to for balance."

And return to it again and again is just what Mahon has done with

her life. Well, that and a lot of other kick-ass things. She and her husband, Ted, chronicle their mountain life and adventures on their blog "Stuck in the Rockies," which, contrary to its name, depicts a life that is anything but "stuck." However, as her impressive resume continues to collect momentum with each new "first" she accomplishes, Mahon acknowledges that in order to speed things up, you first have to slow them down. In her world of summits, records, and races, Mahon seeks that simple (and often metaphorical) slowness that she finds so readily on the trail. Running on the trail.

As an accomplished ski mountaineer, Mahon has spent her fair share of time trudging up snow- and ice-covered peaks in order to ski down them. She says, "There are so many complicated things that go

into ski mountaineering. You have to consider routes, conditions, your team, snowpack, timing, weather. There's this beautiful simplicity of just going for a long run on a trail. You can go alone, at night, in the morning, at lunch, whenever, wherever, and with whomever you want and it can still feel epic and impactful," says Mahon.

THAT SIMPLICITY IS ESSENTIAL TO MAHON, A WOMAN WHO JUGGLES SKI MOUNTAINEERING, ULTRAMARATHON RUNNING, MENTORSHIP ROLES, AND WRITING ABOUT ALL OF THE ABOVE, ALL WHILE WORKING HER DAY JOB AT THE ASPEN CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES (ACES)—a job that she is passionate about and a job that is in many ways intertwined with the peace she finds on the trail







or in the mountains. With her career and her passions, Mahon has managed to weave together these aspects of her life so that each feeds into another (including her personal life, as she calls her husband her “built-in adventure buddy”).

The mission of ACES is to educate the Roaring Fork Valley community on environmental science and ecological literacy. As the development director at ACES, Mahon connects the impact of her work with the life she leads on the trail. “Through working with naturalists programs, I’ve learned how important it is to literally stop and smell the flowers,” she says. “Sometimes, instead of a training run, you just need to pack a liter of wine, some cheese, a bird book, and a pair of binoculars to reconnect with the environment.”

In many ways, says Mahon, experiencing wild spaces is the best way to protect them, because sharing

those experience engages a human connection to their value. “It’s so important for us to explore public lands,” says Mahon, who traveled to Bears Ears National Park to run through the threatened area with her husband. “We all own these spaces, and the more personal connections we can create with them the better.” In both her work for ACES and her adventurous pursuits, Mahon’s relationship with the land goes beyond the scientific and ecological to a philosophical idea that circles back to the sanctity of slowness.

“THAT’S WHERE YOU’RE REMINDED OF THE PRECARIOUS HUMAN GRASP ON LIFE AND THE CHALLENGES THAT WE FACE MOMENT TO MOMENT. WE LIVE IN A FAST-PACED WORLD, AND WHILE I FIND IT EXHILARATING, I THINK WE CAN FIND MORE CLARITY AND PURPOSE

WHEN WE FIND TIME TO SIT SILENTLY BY TRICKLING WATER AND SEEK STILLNESS,” EXPLAINS MAHON.

When asked if adding an intense training schedule—the sort of training that enables her to run ultra marathons (100+ milers) to her trail time muffles the philosophy, Mahon laughs. “I race to train, not the other way around,” she replies. What she means is that a big goal, such as a 100-mile race, gives her the motivation to prioritize running on trail, which in turn prioritizes those meditative moments in her life. Racing doesn’t add pressure or unnecessary stress to those long days on trail, rather, it makes those days happen—and the longer the race, the more opportunity to explore.

For Mahon, the immediate nature of running on a trail, just you, your legs, your feet, and your will to keep going, allows for a more immediate

TOP AND OPPOSITE: Christy Mahon in her happy place—the mountains.





exploration of the world around you. There's no buffer between you and the world and how you motor your way through it. "For me, it's the best way to get out and see incredible spaces," says Mahon. "Running allows you to get further faster and put together long days that you wouldn't be able to accomplish by hiking." For Mahon, those long days can be anything from a 20-mile jog to running the Leadville 100.

Although it may seem like Mahon dove straight into ultra-endurance stardom, she emphatically asserts that in both running and mountaineering, she started small. Seven-mile commuter runs led to road half marathons, which led to marathons, which led to trail marathons, which led to 50-milers and on to 100-milers. In some ways, Mahon stumbled into trail running, but that stumbling felt almost fated, as she found peace on the trail. For Mahon, any

trail offers echoes of the place that originally inspired her as a 20-year-old ranger in the woods.

Part of Mahon's gift is her ability to inspire others to push themselves further than they think they can go. Because she takes the time to slow it down on the trail, Mahon finds empowerment in her trail adventures and she wants to empower others as well, especially other girls and women. "When other girls or women see that I can go out and put these trips—long-distance trail running or ski mountaineering trips—together, that I can do them on my own, they just might be inspired to do something like that on their own," she says. And this goes for the women closest to her as well. Both her sister and her mother were motivated to run ultra and half marathons because they saw what Mahon had accomplished and, most importantly, what the doing did for her state of mind.

"It's all about baby steps," says Mahon on helping other women pursue their outdoor goals. "You set a goal that is achievable and something that you want to do, then you put in the time. We all think that successful women are naturally talented or special, but you eventually have this a-ha moment that you can be whoever you want to be, you just have to put in the work." In other words? Start slow. Start small.

Just like in running, when she started ski mountaineering Mahon started on the little hill, built to a medium mountain, and finally pursued alpine ascents. She worked between each interval in order to reach the next, putting in the time and effort necessary in order to never give her own self-doubt the chance to say "I told you so."

"WE ALL NEED TO KNOW THAT SUCCESS HURTS A LITTLE BIT, THAT IT'S HARD FOR EVERYONE AT EVERY LEVEL," SAYS MAHON, SPEAKING DIRECTLY ON TRAIL RUNNING BUT LIKELY ON

EVERYTHING ELSE IN HER WORLD. WHETHER IN ECOLOGY, RACING, OR CLIMBING MOUNTAINS, REACHING BIG GOALS SOMETIMES REQUIRES YOU TO THINK SMALL AND FOCUS ON THE PROCESS. ONE THING MAHON ASSERTS FOR ALL THINGS OUTDOORS, RUNNING, AND TRAILS: "YOU'RE NEVER SORRY YOU WENT."

Although she's emphatically energetic, with a warm smile and an infectious laugh, Mahon lingers for a moment on the importance of smallness, emphasizing how valuable it is to get outside to feel small. "In the wilderness, you feel like just one part of the vast universe," says Mahon. "You realize that the problems you think are so big are really quite insignificant, and there's so much balance that comes from viewing yourself as small." Ultimately, it's a way of making sense of the world and her place in it. Not bad for a day on the trail.



# WHAT TO PACK WHEN OUT ON THE TRAIL



**SHOES** A no-brainer, you need good kicks. Mahon likes **Hoka Speedgoats**. We also recommend **Salomon** shoes for trail running. Your best bet is to try shoes on before purchasing, so visit your local shoe store and get to know what works for your feet.



**SOCKS** Do your feet a favor and choose the kind that don't give you hot spots. It's not advisable to go cheap on the socks when you're logging mile after mile. **Darn Tough Vermont** socks will stand up to any amount of miles you can put on them.

## WATER... AND MORE WATER

On long runs, you might not be able to carry the amount of water you should be drinking. So think about a tool like **Lifestraw's** water filter; it's lightweight and allows you to drink straight from the water source without worry. Stay hydrated.



**DRINK VEST** Helps you carry enough water for many of your miles.



**FOOD** Something carby and caffeineated for the long runs. Mahon recommends **Honeystinger** as the best go-to bites. It's never a bad idea to have a special treat stashed away in your car for when you return. It's up to you whether that's a cooler of beer or something savory.

**SUNSCREEN** Because the long ones ALWAYS go longer than you expect. Mahon also uses a UV buff to fight the sun and sweat.

**EMERGENCY BEACON** Better safe than sorry.



**GPS APP** Put it on your phone with plenty of battery life. Because at some point you're going to have to turn, and it's good to know which way.

## THE CHRISTY MAHON ADVENTURE CHECKLIST:

**THE CLASSICS:** The runs that you can do again and again, that are close to home, and never fail to amaze you with their beauty, challenge, and accessibility.

**CHRISTY'S ASPEN-AREA CLASSIC:** The 26.6-mile Four-Pass Loop around Maroon Bells.

**THE POINT-TO-POINT:** The runs that require a little more planning but can result in a lot more satisfaction because you cover ground only once. Drop a car at the finish or spend the night somewhere and return on point-to-points.

**CHRISTY'S PTP (POINT TO POINT):** Aspen to Crested Butte. Two options for this run/hike—either the 11-mile trail that goes over the 12,500-foot West Maroon Pass or the 14-mile trail that goes through the East Maroon Pass.

**FEEL LIKE SPOILING YOURSELF?** Check out Limelight Hotel's Crested Butte package, which offers the possibility of a helicopter ride back to Aspen (\$3,000 for six people) with sightseeing that certainly rivals anything you saw on your run over.

**DESTINATION RUNS:** The runs that you find or seek out in places away from home. "Even urban places have trail systems," says Mahon. "These trails are the best way to get to know a new place." Case in point? Portland, Oregon's Forest Park. Christy's favorite destinations? Bryce Canyon and other desert adventures, as well as any of the National Parks. So, you see, she gravitates to the wilderness, but if she's in a city, you can bet she's finding the trails.