

# MOUNTAIN MOTIVATION

Eight adventurous souls recall their highest highs from the past few years and reveal what keeps them motivated when the going gets tough – both out there in the mountains and in the mind

WORDS FRANCESCA DONOVAN (UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED)

A GOOD DAY out of doors can help us feel capable, confident and in control, as well as connected to our bodies, our mind and Mother Nature. And whilst mountains can't cure all ills, it is sometimes the case that facing our fears up high can distract us from stresses we face down at sea level – a welcome reprieve at least for a little while. But when the clocks go back, bluebird days become a distant memory and the great outdoors becomes less great and more grey, the quick fix of health and happiness that the hills provide can easily seem a million miles away.

For me personally, setting personal goals

is a good way to combat the winter blues, put down the TV remote and get myself out of the door – those first steps being the hardest and the most important. But breaking through the comfort zone is about so much more than goals, numbers or a checklist, as the following tales of personal challenge prove. From extraordinary international expeditions to learning the landscapes of home, I asked eight adventurous souls to share their own very personal goals and motivations to keep moving through winter. Some of these stories were told to me, whilst others speak in their own voice. However they speak, I hope they speak to you.



## Personal highs



[above] Journey's end – Andy resting up near Kearvaig bothy  
[right] Andy hiking through Assynt

### WALKING FROM DISASTER TO DIAGNOSIS WORDS: ANDY WASLEY

*Andy Wasley* backpacked himself to the brink of disaster on the Cape Wrath Trail on his first attempt in 2019, sparking a journey to understanding his own trauma, ADHD and, ultimately, self-acceptance. He carried this newfound confidence along Sweden's Kungsleden in 2023 on the walk of a lifetime..

The Cape Wrath Trail is legendarily tough, but its rewards are immense. When I reached Cape Wrath in September 2022, I carried some of my finest adventure memories: rainbows dancing before Beinn Eighe; a ghostly experience in an isolated bothy; violent seas at Sandwood Bay, blasting foam and spray at plovers scurrying across the sand.

I carried bleak memories too. In 2019, my first attempt on the trail ended early after a chain of impulsive decisions led me to a serious accident on a snowy mountain pass. It was followed by two years marked by depression, shame and self-loathing. Mental illness has been a constant in my life, rooted in a childhood broken by abuse and neglect. But I puzzled over the impulsive behaviour that had pushed me to disaster in 2019, and at so many other times in my life. As I finally stood on Cape Wrath's storm-blown cliffs, I decided I had to understand more about my restless mind. Curiosity and need led me into trauma counselling and a diagnosis of ADHD. I'm now starting to make sense of the seemingly uncontrollable emotions and impulses that have led me into some of my worst mishaps – and some of my best adventures.

In 2023 I hiked the Kungsleden, Sweden's spectacular Arctic trail. Across tundra and bogs, through towering valleys and ancient birch forests, I enjoyed hard days and good with a new-found peace and self-confidence. It was the first time I had approached a long-distance trail with a real understanding of the role adventure plays in my life: the way it calls me to look beyond the narrow horizons of my mental illness – and the dangers it can contain if my self-awareness falters. Back in 2019 I writhed in pain on snow, feeling beaten, broken and hopeless. But without knowing it, on that bleak mountainside I started a new journey: a long walk towards self-acceptance, measured in steps, days and memories that trace a course through Scotland, Sweden and life.

Photo credit: Andy Wasley



*“Back in 2019 I writhed in pain on snow, feeling beaten, broken and hopeless...”*