

NATURE'S GYM, SWIMMING, CYCLING, RUNNING

WWW.OUTDOORFITNESSMAG.COM

Outdoor Fitness

GO EXTREME!

★ MEGA TRIATHLONS
THE BRAVEHEART

★ 3D TREKKING
FREE RUNNING

★ ULTRA RUN
NAMIB 550

THE £20,000,000 MAN
Sir Ranulph
Fiennes

STAND UP
PADDLE
BOARDING
EVERYDAY
ELITE
NUTRITION
EVEREST HERO
KENTON COOL



Wild
Camping
Walking
Hadrian's
Wall



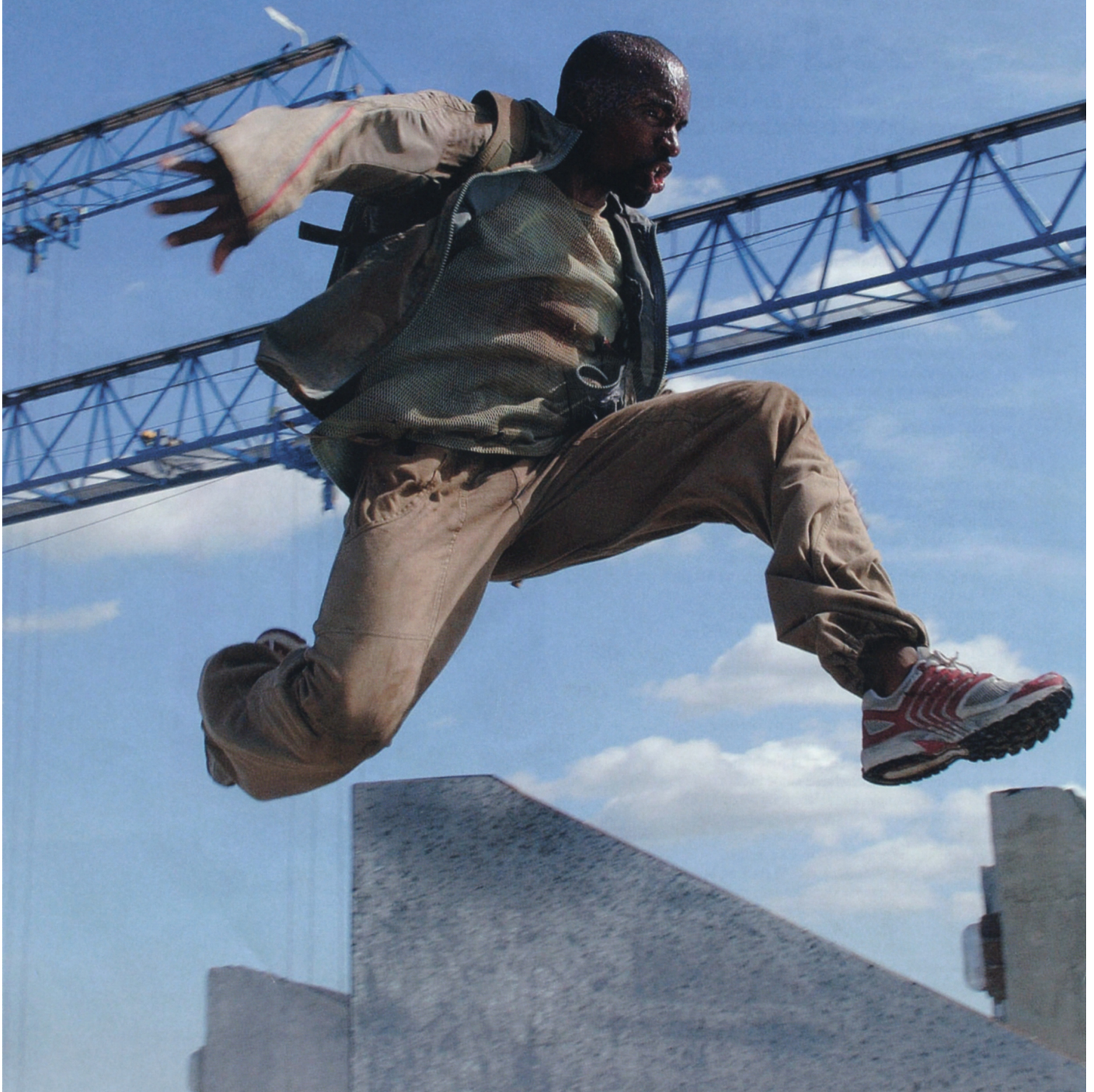
ISSUE 46 SEPT 2015 £4.50

PLUS ULTRA WORKSHOPS, CARB TRUTHS, 30MIN WORKOUT

3D TREKKING

Sebastien Foucan's Freerunning Academy

Intrepid Outdoor Fitness scribe Maxwell Roche sets off for an urban 3D trek. Advised that he may crack something if he falls, Maxwell pays particular attention to the advice of Mr freerunning - Sebastien Foucan.





Maxwell Roche and Sebastien Foucan all smiles before the off.



A SHORT TIME ago, whilst surfing the internet I happened across a YouTube clip entitled *Ultimate Parkour Fails*. Knowing little about the practice of Parkour I let curiosity get the better of me and hazarded a click. Anyone who has already seen *Ultimate Parkour Fails* will understand my shock (and awe), as I witnessed a seemingly never ending stream of urban accidents. Wincing repeatedly between bursts of guilt-infused laughter I watched as Parkour enthusiasts or freerunners as they are often referred to, ran around the city risking limb and often life attempting to vault, jump and somersault over seemingly insurmountable walls, across impossible gaps and within inches of lethal precipices. Now I'm a stickler for a bit of slapstick comedy but it was blindingly obvious that these guys and girls weren't taking such hefty risks just to keep unsympathetic people like me amused. So why then? What was to be gained from performing these wild and potentially life ending feats? I needed to know more...

In the heart of West London there's an academy and running that academy there's a man, and within that man lies the secret. His name is Sebastien Foucan - the founder of freerunning. Foucan was born in the Parisian suburb of Lisnes and there it all began.

"Look up yer!" said Sebastien pointing to the top of a tall crane outside Latimer Road Tube station, "We go?" I squinted up toward the crane and then back toward him with a "please be joking" look on my face. The James Bond fans among you will empathise with me here. After all, the Sebastien Foucan in whose company I now found myself was the very same Sebastien Foucan who acted in the opening sequence of *Casino Royale*, fist fighting with Daniel Craig on top of a not too dissimilar crane. Earlier that week I'd contacted his academy and as luck would have it, managed to book into a few of his evening classes. As previously mentioned I'd become intrigued by the practice of Parkour/freerunning and I wanted to discover for myself, from a pioneer of the discipline no less, not only the motivations behind the discipline, but its potential for the likes of you and me.

When I turned up at Latimer Road it was a balmy spring evening and Sebastien was ready to greet me, all smiles, together with a motley crew of would-be freerunners. Slightly self-conscious about my shorts, which were a little on the tight side for a streetwise Parkour posse, I was reassured to see Sebastien himself clad in a pair of Lycra running tights. I asked cheekily if he'd developed a penchant for them while performing in ITV's *Dancing on Ice*.

"The idea Sebastien told us is to paint a personal picture on the urban landscape and overcome whatever obstacles present themselves in a way that best suits you as an individual."

Chuckling he replied: "It's just my way now, my Satori". He went on to explain that Satori is a Japanese Zen Buddhist term for "Seeing into one's true nature, and finding one's own path". Never before have I heard a man speak so profoundly about his choice of trousers. Having had enough of the small talk Sebastien soon beckoned us all with an outstretched arm and skipped off: "Follow me," he said "Now we go trekking".

"Urban Trekking" (as Sebastien calls it) is the basis for an evening spent freerunning. Best described it is a spritely, multi-directional jog on the balls of one's feet. Whilst jogging you follow a designated leader in whichever direction they choose but not (and this is key), on their exact path. The idea Sebastien told us is to paint a personal picture on the urban landscape and overcome whatever obstacles present themselves in a way that best suits you as an individual. There's no right or wrong path he explained, it's just important to choose the one that feels most natural and artistic. Along the way on our initial trek we encountered steel railings, stone bollards, brick walls and staircases, and each of us negotiated them

differently, some would snake around while others would vault across and between. Damn, this was so much more fun than plain old jogging.

Already sweating after just five minutes of leaping, bounding and balancing I was relieved when we eventually pulled up for a breather. Hunched over, hands on knees I looked up in the direction of a long staggered brick wall, one section of which stood around eight foot tall the other around 12. "OK" said Sebastien leaving me little time to recover: "Choose a wall, climb up and jump down. There's only one rule, always land on your toes!" Everyone in the group soon started running toward the smaller of the two walls, springing up and grabbing the top so I followed suit, determined not to show myself up. Sebastien watched as I hoisted myself up and over and with a knowing half-smile turned to me afterwards: "Well done" he said, "Now, did you under or overestimate yourself?" Unsure I shrugged a little in response but didn't reply. "You underestimated yourself didn't you? Please climb that one instead" - he said pointing at the far more intimidating 12-foot wall. Feeling flattered, but no more confident, and still not wanting to embarrass myself, I took an even lengthier run up and leapt for the top. As my fingers lodged on the highest bricks and I hauled myself up cheers rang out among the group. He was right I'd underestimated myself.

Later that day I had the opportunity to ask Sebastien a few questions. My primary objective was to find out if the practice of Freerunning could benefit sportspeople of other disciplines. According to Sebastien, unlike most traditional outdoor pursuits freerunning is plyometric and involves the muscles moving from extension to contraction in a rapid explosive manner. This he said bears many similarities to the strength, power and conditioning required by martial arts athletes. Climbing and jumping he says are "what we are made for", and dynamic three-dimensional strength and flexibility, heavily involving core power and balance, can indeed be useful whatever your chosen sport. I asked him if he thought a similar type of fitness could be achieved in the gym: "All those beefed up orange guys at the gym, pump reps and limit



themselves, they all try to look the same and follow the same monotonous routine. In Freerunning we don't follow". I asked him to elaborate and he made an interesting reference to the Hindu philosophy of Ayurveda. He explained how over thousands of years Indian doctors had developed a system of medicine designed to treat patients based not only on their ailment but on the individual characteristics of their minds and bodies. He drew parallels between this philosophy and his own: "As freerunners we explore our individual natures, strengths, weaknesses and develop accordingly, we don't prescribe set exercises or any particular doctrine." I took all that to mean he's not a big fan of the gym, a sentiment I'm sure many *OF* readers will share...

Next up was the Sloth walk. Seb had led us all to a circular steel bar, only about 12 centimetres above the ground, running 10 or so metres around a flower bed. He encouraged us to make progress along it using both hands and feet in smooth relaxed movements, like a sloth. His strong French accent hindered his pronunciation of the word sloth which we all had a chuckle over - Sebastien included. Initially we gripped the bar tightly, as if life depended on it, and moved along in single-file using erratic technique, shaking with exertion and losing balance often. Frowning humorously once again Sebastien demonstrated. "You need to be loose" he said, "Like a cat. Don't struggle against it, lengthen your body, straighten your arms and keep that animalistic flow." With this advice in mind we all gave it a second attempt and astonishingly nearly every single person in the group made it right the way along the bar without falling.

When the class was over I asked Sebastien how he'd come to learn the techniques he'd been teaching us. In answer he harked back to his days growing up in Paris and spoke of his fellow pioneer, friend and mentor David Belle. David he said was always the brave one, they were kids exploring the city, using their natural athleticism to have fun, David would run and he would try to keep up. "It was always about fun," he said, "Never a competition, just a series of never ending and increasingly difficult challenges".

They'd always encourage each other, make a game of everything and in doing so overcome the fear that inevitably arose when the stakes got higher. This playful Peter Pan-esque energy that radiates from Sebastien is definitely something at the heart of his ideology. "When children play they develop," he said, "So as adults we need to keep playing too".

The afternoon's final challenge manifested itself in the form of a three-inch balance beam on top of a nine-foot climbing frame. Still panting

"What he wanted us to do was climb to the top of the frame, walk along its uppermost bar and climb back down. According to Sebastien the bar had quite a high crack factor...."

from the most recent bout of "trekking" we gathered anxiously awaiting our instructions. Based on previous experience we expected to be asked to swing from or jump up and grab the beam but alas, Sebastien had something altogether more perilous in store. What he wanted us to do was climb to the top of the frame, walk along its uppermost bar and climb back down. According to Sebastien the bar had quite a high "crack factor", meaning we were likely to land with a fairly substantial crack if we got it wrong! All of a sudden the consequences of messing it up had got a lot more sinister, a broken arm or leg being almost inevitable. Nevertheless one by one we attempted the climb, all of us making unbearably slow progress and shaking like 1970s disco dancers. Despite the involuntary dance moves we all completed the task without injury only to be greeted once more by Sebastien's mischievous grin. "That took five minutes" he said "Now we do it in one". Yelps of disbelief rang out but reluctantly we fell back into line and readied ourselves for a second helping. So, once again we climbed. The consequences hadn't changed, the bar was still a long way from the ground but somehow the

second time round we made it look so much easier. In fact we completed the climb in well under the ambitious one-minute limit. Sebastien explained afterwards that the Kung Fu Fighting monks of Shaolin, whose methods he often emulates, use a similar technique in their training. They practice unceasingly, teaching their muscles to remember, and then through meditation they endeavor to put aside thought, fear and emotion, and act with complete clarity of mind. To a similar end Sebastien, by asking us to speed up during the task, hadn't removed our focus but he'd left less time for our emotions to take hold. No longer inhibited by fear, and already practiced, we were all able to move across the beam with freedom, smoothly and without hesitation.

If like me you're a bit of a cynic when it comes to Zen, spirituality and the like, you're no doubt rolling your eyes a little whilst reading this; but the truth is... Sebastien won me over. I consider myself a person of average athleticism and enjoy a variety of activities but this one is unique. In one afternoon I explored my personal limits and more importantly discovered some hidden strengths. I also learned techniques used to overcome fear and obstacles. Freerunning not only teaches you psychological lessons but physical ones as well, muscles I never knew I had ached the following day. And so to summarise, it's free, a killer workout, mentally and physically rewarding, and unlike any outdoor pursuit I can think of its creative and expressive. That in my book makes it worth a crack - err not of the type Sebastien had intimated about though. After an hour with Sebastien you'll never look at a bollard or a park bench the same way again. He's right when he says: "The city streets are a training ground just waiting to be unlocked," but whatever you do, know your limits and carefully consider undertaking any obstacle with a high risk factor. And if after careful consideration you still decide to undertake said obstacle, at least make sure you've a loyal friend ready with a video camera. That way when you're writhing in pain waiting for the ambulance to arrive you'll have the small consolation of a guaranteed feature in the 2016 edition of *Ultimate Parkour Fails*.

