



TO THE MOON

AND BACK

There are no limits for ultra runner Chris Moon. He's an inspiring and positive man, living life to the full. He spoke to Fiona Bugler

Chris Moon," it says, on his website, "challenges the concept of limitation." Actions speak louder than words and Chris, a marathon and ultra runner, can back this statement with actions. He lives the no limits philosophy to the full. And as a very much in-demand inspirational speaker, he also talks the talk.

His latest fundraising run was the *Post Office 1000 Challenge*, a 1,000-mile run from Scotland to Barnardo's HQ in Barking, Essex, visiting Barnardo's projects and post offices (where fundraising was focused) along the way.

He completed the challenge in less than a month, and ran an average of 36 miles for the first 28 days. Then from the 29th September he ran 32 miles a day and, he tells me: "On my last day of speeches and fundraising I ran a short one of 14 miles! The aim was to do 1,000 miles, I actually did 1,062."

Surviving death

The 48-year old *Strathaven Strider* runner has 100 marathons and ultras under his belt including running the *Virgin London Marathon* this year in a time of 3:49, and many of the world's toughest ultra marathons including the *Great Sahara Run* and *Badwater*, a 135-mile continuous ultra run through Death Valley.

This level of endurance is truly inspiring, particularly as Chris is what most of us would call 'disabled'. In 1995, at the

age of 33, Chris lost his right arm and the lower part of his right leg in Mozambique, whilst working for a landmine clearing charity. He had already survived kidnap by the Khmer Rouge in 1993, whilst working in Cambodia, one of the very few westerners to do so.

"On the day I was injured, I was doing the least dangerous thing I ever did, which was walking in the middle of a cleared lane. I stepped on a landmine. It was possible it had been booby trapped to 'get' a mine clearer," he explains.

It was quite simply, very bad luck. "I'd lost a lot of blood but managed to stay alive. It helped that I was a fit runner."

Born to run

Chris started running when he was seven years old. He ran to school. At college he trained every day and when he went to Cambodia one of the first things he did was find a running route. And it was running he turned to when he was injured 15 years ago. He left hospital and within a year he had completed the London Marathon (as well as a masters degree).

As an inspirational speaker, the two near-death experiences of kidnap and the injury from the landmine help to illustrate the process of survival. He says: "Survive: shit happens to all of us and when it does we should try and wash it off as quickly as possible. Thrive: be thankful for the things we have, love, live,

laugh and don't be dragged down by negative nasty people. Achieve: always strive to do our best and challenge our limits and listen, and understand. We all make mistakes and shouldn't let them cripple us – just see the chances to learn. Oh," he adds, "And be kind to children and animals."

It's the way you look at things

"I've lived through things that I've been told categorically, and that I know categorically I shouldn't have lived through," Chris tells me. So does he think differently to other people?

"I can be bothered to think. I make the effort to understand what's really going on around me on a daily basis. It's a constant state of questioning."

For many runners racing and training is an individual pursuit with our own goals and times preoccupying us. But for Chris this isn't the case. As someone who worked for a charity before his injury he's clearly naturally altruistic, but perhaps his injury opened up this door fully, as he was less likely to be distracted by the 'normal' runner's goals of time over distance and competing against clubmates.

I ask him how he thinks things would have been for him as a runner had he not been injured. "I'd have been faster!" he replies. But he quickly adds, "I'm motivated by running for charities. I never went the paralympic route because I wanted to raise money."

Chris's altruism extends to reaching out to other runners. In doing this, he believes we can help ourselves, too. "When you get up in the morning to run, you feel more alive than

most people do in a lifetime. If we're lucky enough to do this we should go and find someone who doesn't run, and take them out. If you add value for someone else, then ultimately, you will add value to your life – and your own running."

Chris practises what he preaches and as well as sharing his experience of running he has taken parties of athletes to Mount Kilimanjaro and to run the length of Cambodia to raise money for charities that assist the disabled.



Chris and Penny Lancaster

Running has clearly helped Chris fight any negative demons. He's an ambassador for our sport. "Running gets rid of negative energy, it's a discipline and it's a way to keep ourselves in good order. Also," he adds, "it's just great to be outside."

"You find your soul running – if you choose to be brave enough to look for it. I lost my soul when I was blown up. I had to rediscover it. I had to not give in to the badness."

Even though they impact on his running speed, Chris prefers ultras to marathons and says he wants to be running them when he's 73! (And, he says, we should all have a long-term goal.) "With

ultras, it's the grinding relentless question of whether I can control my circumstances, or be controlled by them," he says.

Whether Chris was born with teeth gritted and fists clenched, ready to take on any extreme challenge life could throw at him, or whether his experiences shaped him, he, or we will probably never know, but, nature or nurture, his determination and focus is truly inspirational.

"The only limits are the ones we impose on ourselves, sometimes we realise it, sometimes we don't. Each of us must find the key that unlocks our door to going one step beyond the limits," he says.

One Step Beyond is published by Macmillan, £7.99. Listen to Chris Moon talking to Julia Armstrong on the Running Free podcast at www.runningfreemag.co.uk and at www.runningtolearn.com.

FOCUS ON THE CHARITY

■ The Barnardo's *Believe in Children* appeal was launched on 1st September – a fundraising appeal supported by Barnardo's charity partner Royal Mail Group. Donations to the *Believe in Children* Appeal can be made online at www.barnardos.org.uk or at any Post Office.

■ Barnardo's works with more than 100,000 children, young people and their families in 415 specialised projects in communities across the UK.

"We believe in the potential in every child and young person, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We will support them, stand up for them and bring out the best in each and every child. "Every year we help thousands of children turn their lives around. But we cannot do it without you."

Visit www.barnardos.org.uk to find out how you can get involved and show you believe in children.

