

YOUR 4-WEEK PLAN FOR LEAN MUSCLE

Men's Fitness

JUNE 2021

INCORPORATING **Outdoor**
FITNESS & ADVENTURE

STRONGER THAN EVER

STEVE BACKSHALL
HOW TO TRAIN
SMART & HARD
IN YOUR 40s

FUNCTIONAL MOVES FOR FULL-BODY STRENGTH

6 WAYS TO
BOOST YOUR
CONFIDENCE

BEST BODY BLUEPRINT

- ★ NUTRITION
- ★ WORKOUTS
- ★ MOTIVATION

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LIFTING MISTAKES YOU MUST AVOID

**WATER
SPORTS
SPECIAL**
SUP • SURFING
KAYAKING • SWIMMING

HOW TO FLY

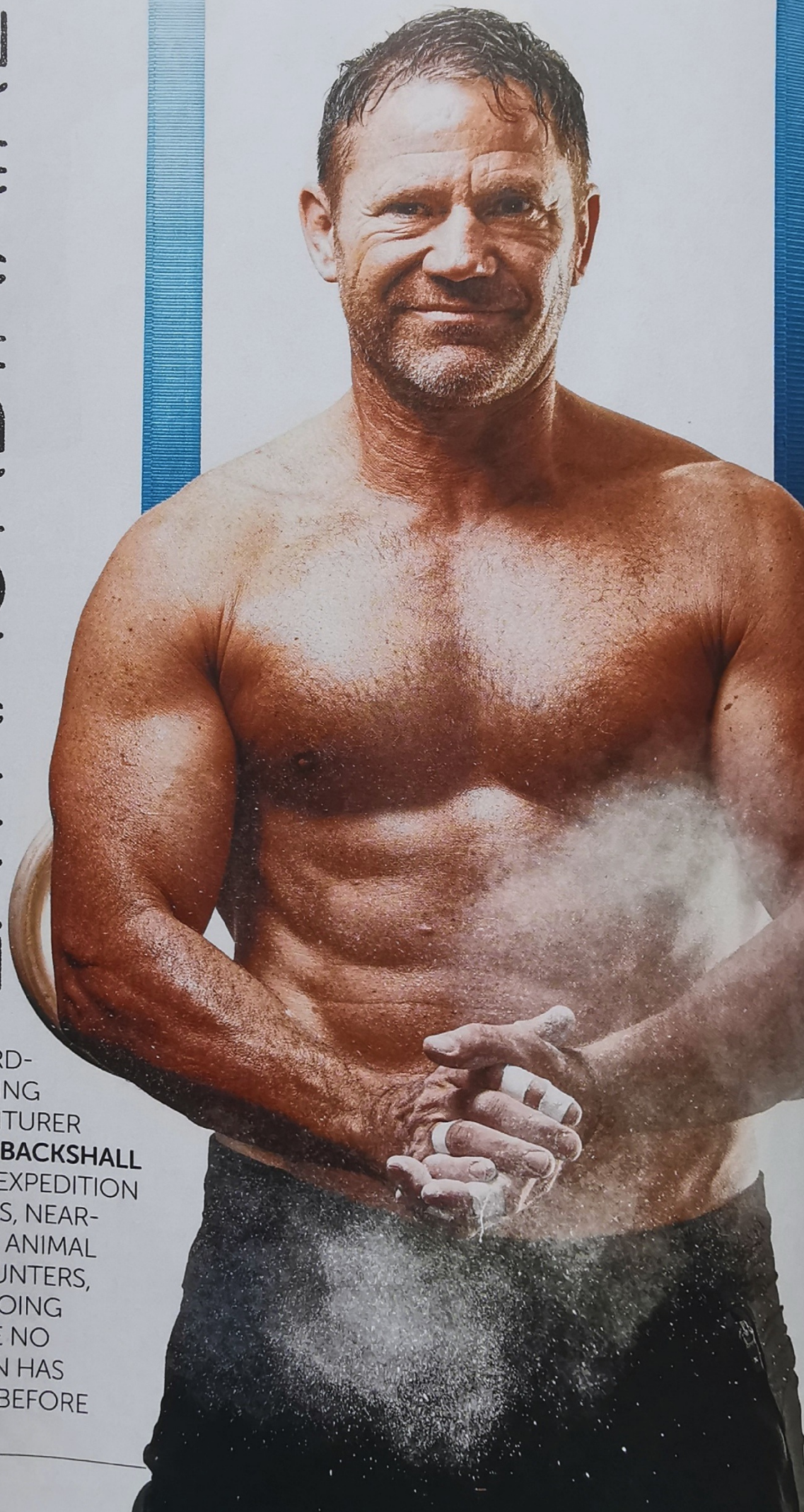
THE MAN
DEFYING
GRAVITY

**+ MUSCLE FOOD
ADVENTURE KIT
JAMES HASKELL**



EXPLORE EXTRAORDINAIRE

RECORD-BREAKING ADVENTURER **STEVE BACKSHALL** TALKS EXPEDITION FITNESS, NEAR-DEATH ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS, AND GOING WHERE NO HUMAN HAS GONE BEFORE





our kids will recognise him as the face of the BBC's BAFTA-winning *Deadly 60* – in which he tracks down the deadliest animals on the planet in the name of children's entertainment – and you probably know

him from any number of wildlife shows he's fronted in over two decades as a TV presenter.

But while his work as biologist is beamed across our screens, Steve Backshall MBE is also a discoverer of new worlds. Venturing into parts unknown, his work on the BBC's *Undiscovered Worlds* earned him 2020's Scientific Exploration Society's Explorer of the Year award, and last year he made a world-first descent of savage white-water rivers in Russia's Far-East Kamchatka Peninsula.

To go where no one has gone before requires a cast-iron mindset and unwavering commitment to face danger head on, but scaling sheer rock faces and navigating violent rapids is also dependant on a body stable, strong and resilient enough to withstand the full force of nature.

Now 48, Backshall credits calisthenics and a renewed training intensity – coached into him by Wild Training founder (and former *MF* cover model) James Griffiths – with helping him stay expedition-fit all year round.

Men's Fitness: Where does your passion for the natural world come from?

Steve Backshall: It's something I've had since I was a kid. I can remember being really disappointed that the golden era of exploration was hundreds of years gone and that would never be my reality. But as I got into my late teens and started travelling on my own, I found that totally wasn't true. There are plenty of proper, ground-breaking expeditions yet to be done.

I did my first solo expedition when I was in my early 20s: I tried to walk across New Guinea, and it was

a catastrophic failure from start to finish. I was badly organised and ill-prepared. I had no communication with the outside world, and it happened to be during a time of unprecedented drought, with wildfires burning across the island. So I failed, but I did spend three months in the jungle, learning the hard way about how to do expeditions, and had some extraordinary experiences along the way. That

In *Deadly 60*, Backshall seeks out the animals most of us would run a mile from



Suspension straps allow Backshall to closely replicate his gym routine when away from home

gave me the impetus to crack on with bigger and better-prepared things.

Not long after that, I went and made my own film, in the jungles of Colombia. I ended up selling it to *National Geographic*, and they took me on as their 'adventurer in residence', which remains the best job title I've ever had. Essentially they paid me for the next five years to do similar expeditions – most of them self-filmed – and turn them into television programmes, and I've never looked back.

MF: You've been all around the world, but is there one trip that stands out as the most memorable?

SB: I'm very lucky to still be doing these expeditions, and to continue having the opportunities to go places where no human beings have ever been before – in 2021! It seems absolutely incredible that can be the case, but I've just got back from West Africa, making the first ever descent of a jungle river – which very nearly sunk all my crew. We were with local people who were wide-eyed throughout the entire journey, because neither they, nor their ancestors, had ever made that journey before. Being able to see an environment with completely fresh eyes is something very, very special.

If I had to pick one expedition that really stands out, a white-water first-descent that I did in Kamchatka, Russia, last year, would be right at the top of the list of best ever >>

It's a no from us



» expeditions. We found a river that has never been paddled before – it's Class V white water [extremely difficult, long, and violent] – and we ran it with a team of incredibly strong paddlers. It was just mesmerising, and the sensation of being able to say, "This is completely new; no one has ever seen this landscape from this vantage point before" is awesome.

MF: In *Undiscovered Worlds*, you go cave diving in Mexico – how does it feel to descend into a place no one has been before?

SB: In this present day and age, if you want to be an explorer, you want to be a cave diver. There are more miles of undiscovered, sunken cave passages than there are mapped cave passages, so it is an environment that still has an unbelievable amount of potential. If you go to a completely new location – like we were in the Yucatán Peninsula – you're shining light on things that have never been

seen before by human eyes. They are stunningly beautiful, these caves. They're magnificently decorated with stalagmites and stalactites, and some of them even have the remains of ancient, stone-aged animals inside them: mastodons, cave bears and long-extinct mammoths. It is breathtaking.

MF: The stuff we see on TV is the result of serious planning and hard work – can you give a sense of some of the unique demands of the job?

SB: Cave diving is one of the most logistically challenging types of expedition. Just to get to the mouth of a cave system, there could be several days of hiking through a rainforest. But you're not just hiking; you're carrying all your cylinders, your wetsuits, your dive cameras and all these things. Then inevitably you need to abseil down to the entrance, and just doing that in all your dive gear is pretty full on.

If you do it right, you can make it pretty safe, but because you're way out there in the middle of nowhere, anything that goes wrong is going to have catastrophic consequences. You have to be 100 per cent self-reliant – nobody else is coming to save you – and even the smallest mistake, like running out of light or kicking up bad visibility, is probably going to kill you. That is a degree of commitment that I think we are unfamiliar with in 'normal' life.

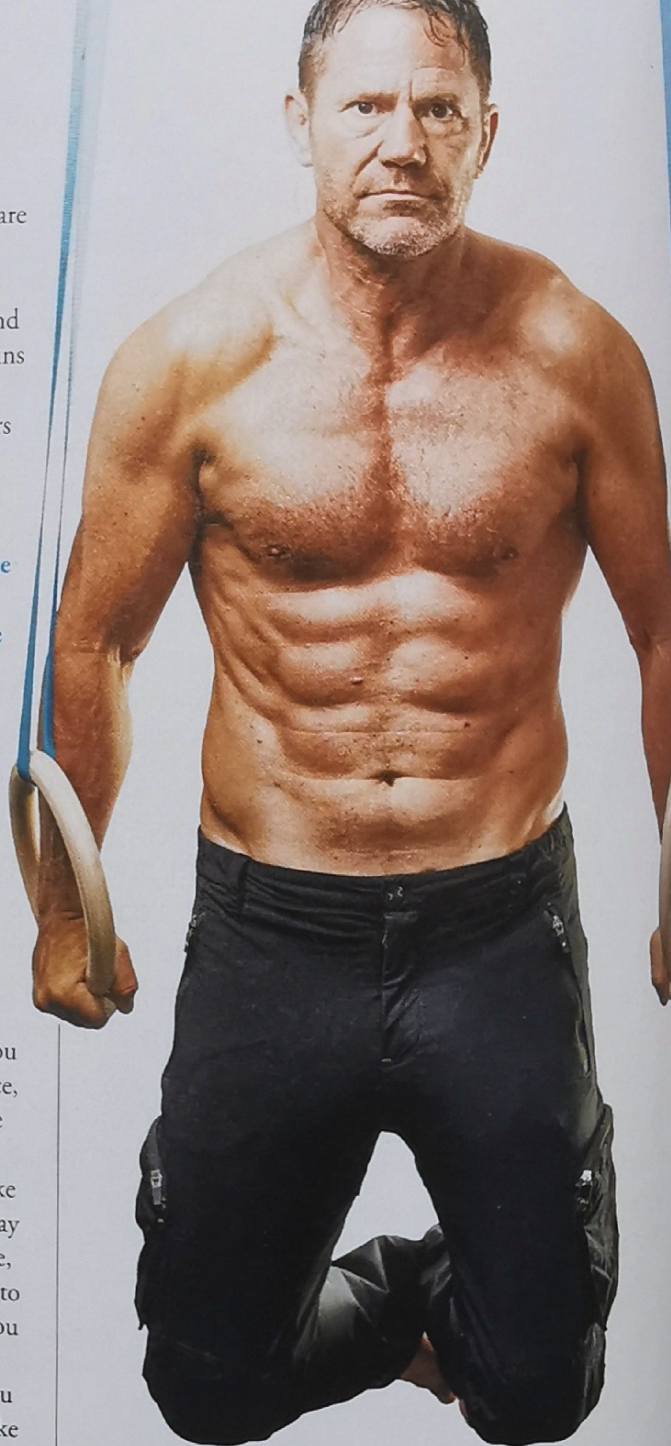
MF: Are you ever fearful in those situations?

SB: Definitely, and fear is very

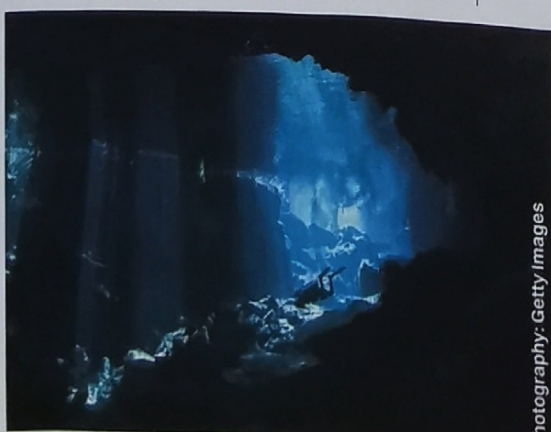
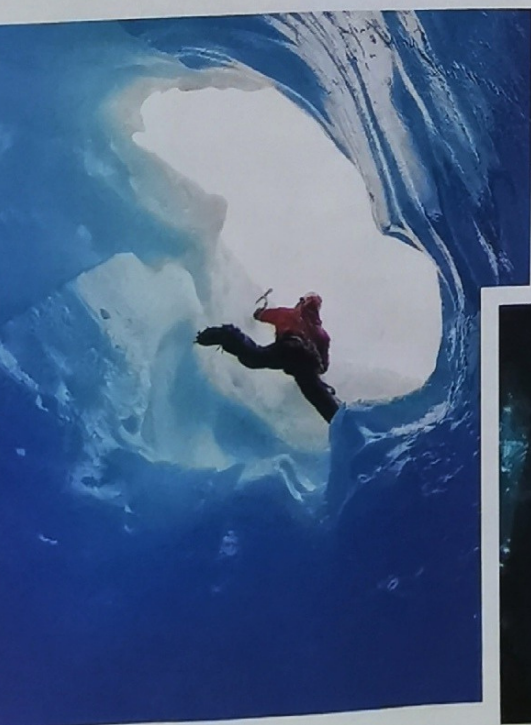
useful. Fear is something you need to have: it stops you from making stupid decisions. But it does need to be kept under control. The way I do it is through breathing techniques and focusing on simple tasks. The only time I've truly panicked was cave diving, when I was waiting in a chamber with a dive woman called Katie, and we were there for about half an hour just lying on the bottom. After a while we ran out of small things to check and monitor, and you end up thinking, *Woah, hang on, we're a kilometre underground in a cave no one has been before, with the ceiling directly above our heads.* Your heart rate goes up and your blood starts pumping – and that's bad, because you use up more oxygen – so you just have to distract your mind as best as possible.

MF: You must have witnessed the decline of the natural world first-hand in the areas you've revisited – has that shocked you?

SB: A lot of the places that I go back to over



“BEING ABLE TO SEE AN ENVIRONMENT WITH COMPLETELY FRESH EYES IS SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL”



Photography: Getty Images

and over again have gone downhill massively. In places I used to dive in the early 90s, for instance, you would see an abundance of sharks, and now you see none. Places I used to go – particularly South-East Asia – you would see an infinity of rainforest, but now all you see are palm oil plantations. There are a lot of places it can be really grim to go back to, but we have to use that as impetus, and we have to find ways to learn from what's happened. One of the most powerful tools I have is the ability to show natural wonder to lots of people. Simply highlighting an animal's plight, or showcasing the beauty of a landscape, can be a very powerful tool.

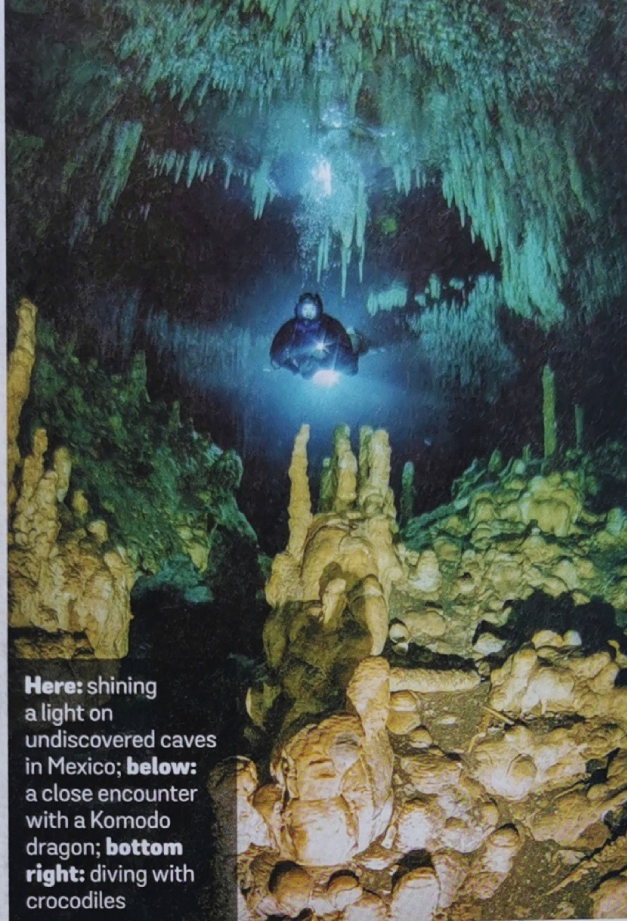
MF: Moving onto fitness, how do you stay in expedition-ready shape all year round?

SB: The critical thing for me is making sure my fitness is very malleable and adaptable. Right now, I'm heading out on an exploratory diving expedition. The last one I did was a white-water paddling expedition, and the next one will be climbing, so I need to make sure I can bounce from one activity to the next. What I've found is, if I can focus a lot on things like calisthenics – which give you really good strength-to-bodyweight ratio, power and flexibility – I'm less likely to get injured and more likely to be able to apply my strength in the real world.

It's really important to keep up the cardiovascular fitness, and my go-to bit of kit in the gym is the Olympic rings. They're all about grip strength and hauling your own bodyweight around – which is what it's like when you're rock climbing, or paddling, or simply carrying big loads. That kind of functional strength is just so valuable.

MF: How does the set-up at Wild Training [the gym Backshall uses] help with that?

SB: I don't want to turn this into too much of an advert – I don't get anything free off the founder, James! – but the guy is so inspiring, I haven't



Here: shining a light on undiscovered caves in Mexico; **below:** a close encounter with a Komodo dragon; **bottom right:** diving with crocodiles



“YOU COULD HAVE FLIPPED A COIN AS TO WHETHER WE LIVED OR WERE KILLED IN THAT SITUATION”

met anyone who stays as on top of all of the trends and all of the protocols in modern training. I first met James after a big rock-climbing accident in 2010, when I broke my back in two places and destroyed my ankle; I really needed to make a comeback, and he completely rebuilt me. We looked at all kinds of functional exercise, he completely rescheduled my training programme – which had been based around lots of long cardio – and gave me sessions that could be done much quicker. Most of my sessions are half an hour now, whereas they used to take hours, but I get just as much out of them, if not more.

MF: How do you stay in shape when you're away from the gym?

SB: There are two things I always take with me: suspension straps and a skipping rope. Used right, the straps can replicate everything I need, and the rope provides a really good, high-intensity cardio workout in ten or 15 minutes.

WORKOUT WISDOM

STAY ON TOP OF YOUR GAME WITH EXPEDITION-READY TRAINING ADVICE

TRAIN WITH INTENSITY

A globe-trotting father-of-three like Backshall can't afford to be scrolling through Twitter during five-minute rest periods. Intensity is the name of the game.

“It can be really hard to find the time,” he says. “But if you train smart, you can get something significant out of a 15-minute session. If that's all you've got, you just need to make sure you do everything to failure and really max out.”

MAKE MORNINGS COUNT

If you often start your workouts fatigued and in no mood to push yourself, heed the advice of Backshall's wife, double-Olympic rowing gold medalist Helen Glover:

“If Hells is training, as soon as she gets up in the morning she spikes her testosterone by doing something intense – something that makes you grit your teeth – for five or ten minutes,” says Backshall. “After that, the rest of the day is a breeze. My go-to is hitting the bag. I'll wake up, go nuts on the punchbag for a few minutes, then my adrenaline and testosterone are up and I'm ready to go for the rest of the day.”

MF: Finally, have you ever been put in serious danger by any of the animals you've filmed with?

SB: One incident immediately springs to mind. We were swimming with crocodiles in the Okavango Delta, in Botswana – which is already fairly dangerous! But it was made much, much worse when we swam face first into a hippo. I think, retrospectively, you could have flipped a coin as to whether we lived or were killed in that situation. It was pure chance that the animal was so surprised by seeing us there that it gave us the time we needed to bolt out and get to the surface – otherwise we would have been history. **MF**

EXPEDITION FITNESS

ONE OF THE WILD TRAINING WORKOUTS STEVE BACKSHALL USES TO MAINTAIN FUNCTIONAL STRENGTH WELL INTO HIS FORTIES

1. BAG WORK

REPS: 3 mins

REST: 1 min SETS: 3

- Muay Thai – so punches, elbows, knees and kicks.
- Perfect punches and powerful kicks are less important than getting your heart rate up and nervous system primed for the work to come.



2. CHAIN AROUND THE WORLD

REPS: 20 (left and right) REST: 30 secs SETS: 3

- Start with the chain hanging in front your thighs, with a good grip on each end.
- Lift your right elbow high and aim to get your right hand over your left shoulder.
- Pass the chain around your shoulder, until it sits vertically down your back.

- Then bring your left elbow high and aim to get your left hand over your right shoulder.
- Try to create a smooth, continuous loop.
- Make the sure the chain passes both shoulder blades behind you.
- Reverse to complete in both directions.



3. ARCHER PRESS-UP WITH BARBELL

REPS: 45 secs REST: 15 secs SETS: 6

- With the barbell on the floor, assume a press-up position and reach out one hand to hold the middle of the bar.
- Keep that arm straight as you slowly roll the bar away from you.
- With your arm extended, perform a press-up, keeping your other elbow tight in to your side.
- Too hard? You can drop to your knees as a regression.



4. PARALLEL BAR DIP TO V SIT

REPS: To failure

REST: 60 secs SETS: 3-4

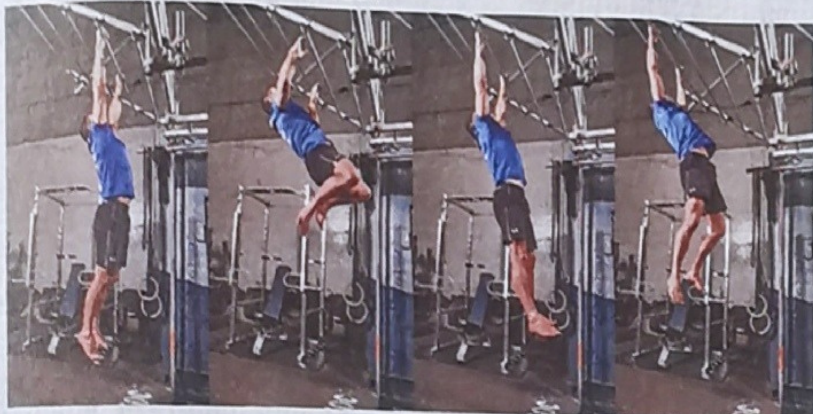
- Set up in a strong support position, with shoulders depressed and elbows locked.
- Perform a dip to the full range of movement.
- Lockout your arms at the top.
- Lift your legs to either a tuck sit, L sit or V sit position.
- Try to lower your legs slowly to get the most from the reps.



5. SALMON LADDER

REPS: 8 (4 up, 4 down) REST: As needed SETS: 3-4

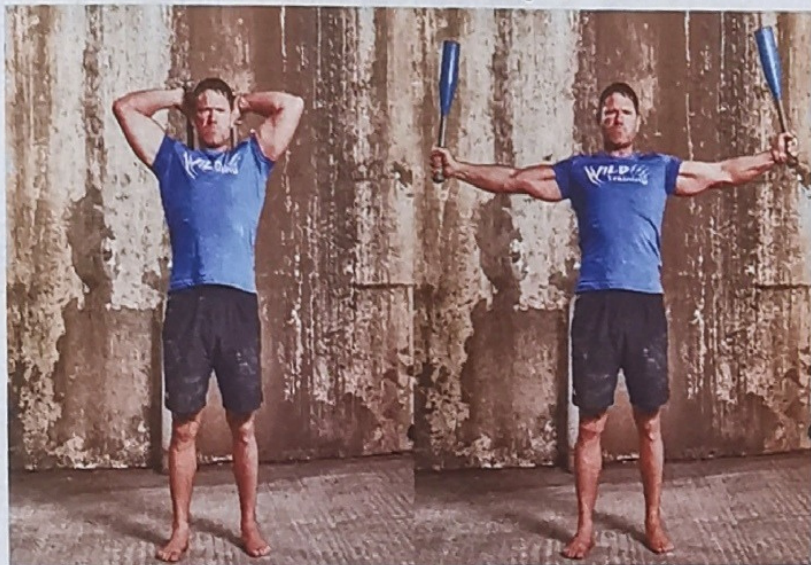
- Hang from the lowest bar.
- Pull up explosively while you lift your knees. Lifting your knees up quickly will give you more time and height in the air to grab the next bar.
- Pull up and drop down on two low bars, before trying to progress to the high bars, to make sure you're competent with the technique.



6. POWER CLUBS (LATERAL TORCH LIFT)

REPS: 30-45 secs REST: 30 secs SETS: 3-4

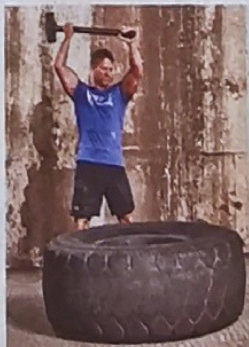
- Lift the clubs so they both sit behind your back, with your elbows high.
- Now raise them slightly, as if starting a triceps press.
- Rather than locking out the triceps press, lift the clubs out to the sides.
- Lift them to a torch position, where the clubs are held vertically - in line with your hips.
- The progression would be to go from the torch hold into the axe hold, where you lock your arms out in line with your shoulders, keeping the clubs vertical.
- Return to the start position by reversing the movements.



7. TYRE HIT

REPS: 60 secs REST: 30 secs SETS: 4

- Keep your stance square to the tyre.
- Hold the hammer at the bottom of the handle with one hand, and near the head with the other.
- Lift the hammer around your shoulder until it's high overhead.
- Now give it plenty of momentum as you drive it down, before you slide your top hand down to the bottom of the handle.
- Pull down through your lats, chest, abs and arms.
- Once you hit the tyre, catch the head of the hammer with your other hand.
- Repeat as an alternating swing, so a different hand catches the head each time you hit the tyre.



8. TYRE FLIP

REPS: 60 secs REST: 2 mins SETS: 3

- Set up with your chest and shoulders touching the top edge of the tyre.
- Keep your weight on the balls of your feet, with your heels in the air.
- Take a deep breath and lengthen your upper back.
- Now drive at roughly a 45-degree angle, as this is the direction the tyre will move.
- Make your first step as big as possible and don't stop - keep running into the tyre.
- Flip your hands over and push all the way through.
- If you make your first step big enough you can make your second step a knee into the tyre, which can flip it over faster.

