

A high-altitude mountain landscape under a clear blue sky. In the foreground, a hiker with a red backpack is walking up a steep, snow-covered slope. The snow is white with some tracks and shadows. In the background, there are more snow-capped mountain peaks and a layer of white clouds or mist. The overall scene is majestic and challenging.

PRESS PACK

Masha Gordon Explorers' Grand Slam world record challenge

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Biography

Masha Gordon (42), a mother-of-two and businesswoman, is on course to enter the world record books by becoming the fastest woman in the world to complete the Explorers' Grand Slam: the ultimate adventure challenge of climbing the highest mountains of each of the seven continents and trekking to the geographic North and South poles.

Masha was born in Russia's mountainous Caucasus region but did not take up climbing until her thirties. In fact, Masha failed in PE at school and at the age of 31 was unable to run without being out of breath. She took up mountaineering when a friend invited her on a climb during a visit to Chamonix.

After studying at Moscow University, Masha started her career as a fixer, then junior reporter, with the Moscow bureau of the Washington Post. She later studied in the United States, gaining a BA in political science from the University of Wisconsin and a Masters in law and diplomacy from Tufts University.

Masha spent the next 16 years of her career working in finance and navigating the world's capital markets. She was Managing Director of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and most recently led the emerging markets portfolio management team at PIMCO.

She moved to a portfolio career of non-executive board roles in 2014 and currently serves as a non-executive director of Alrosa, the world's largest diamond company, member of the investment committee of the Enterprise Development Programme of Oxfam UK, and the Council of the Girls Day School Trust.

As a mother-of-two, Freya (8) and Theo (6), Masha wants to inspire other women to take up challenges that were unimaginable to them before and for the girls to take up the practice of outdoor activities to build their self confidence and mental resilience. She is in the process of setting up the charity Grit & Rock to encourage teenage girls in deprived areas to take up mountaineering as a way to build grit and other leadership qualities.

GRIT&ROCK

Going for the world record

Masha is already 2/3 of the way to setting a new women's world record in the Explorers' Grand Slam. She climbed Kilimanjaro (Tanzania, Africa) in October 2015 and conquered Vinson Massif (Antarctica) and the South Pole in December, Aconcagua (Argentina, South America) in January 2016 and Carstensz Pyramid (Indonesia, Australasia) and Elbrus (Russia, Europe) in March.

She will take on the most formidable part of her challenge in April, when she will trek to the North Pole and climb Everest (Nepal, Asia) in just six weeks. She will then climb Denali (Alaska, North America) in June to set a new women's world record of eight months. The current female world record holder Vanessa O'Brien completed the challenge in 11 months in 2013. Only 45 people have ever completed the Explorers' Grand Slam and just two in under a year.

Masha will be pushed to the limits of her physical endurance and mental resilience during the challenge. She will spend over 100 days in a tent, three weeks trekking on skis to the North and South Poles in -40C weather and expose herself to the "death zone" – the altitude above 8,000m where there is not enough oxygen for humans to breathe.

Looking to inspire girls

Masha has taken on this challenge to inspire teenage girls to challenge themselves and build up their self confidence. Britain today faces a confidence crisis among its teenage girls, with one of the widest self-confidence gaps for 16-19 year olds. Research shows that girls aged 13 to 15 fall significantly below boys in their ability to successfully meet challenge. They become vulnerable to the pressures of social stereotype; giving up sport, with exacerbates anxiety over body image.

With mountaineering long regarded as one of the best ways to build grit, endurance and resilience, Masha wants Britain's teenage girls to get climbing. Scrambling and the initial steps in mountaineering are highly accessible to all regardless of their base level of fitness. And there are climbing walls in most cities. She will be using the hashtags #ThisGirlCan and #ThisGirlCanClimb and urges others to do the same.



Map: the Seven Summits





The Seven Summits and two poles

Kilimanjaro

Masha reached the summit of Kilimanjaro on October 23, 2015 via the steep Umbwe route in 24 hours. The dormant volcano is the highest mountain in Africa, with the summit at 19,340 feet (5895 metres). The first recorded ascent was by Hans Meyer and Ludwig Purtscheller in 1889. Climbing it allows you to experience five distinct climate zones, from hot equatorial conditions at the base, to arctic ones at the summit.

Vinson Massif

The highest mountain in Antarctica, with a summit at 16,050 feet (4892 metres). It is the most southerly of the so called Seven Summits, lying at 78° S, and the coldest, with temperatures falling to 90° F. It was first climbed in 1966 by Barry Corbet, John Evans, William Long and Pete Schoening. Masha reached the summit on December 5, 2015 before heading for the South Pole.

South Pole

Masha skied the last degree to the South Pole in six days in December, encountering winds of 50 knots an hour and temperatures of -40° F on the way – she had to take half her face with pink plaster to protect it from frostbite. She reached the pole on December 15, 2015. Roald Amundsen led the first expedition to reach the southernmost point of the earth in 1911.

Aconcagua

The tallest mountain in South America, with a summit of 22,841 feet (6962 metres), sits in Argentina near the border with Chile. It was first conquered by Matthias Zurbriggen in 1897. Masha reached the summit on January 31, 2016 with her wrist in a cast, a month after an injury ice climb training in Italy.

The Seven Summits and two poles continued

Carstensz Pyramid

The highest mountain in Australasia, at 16,024 feet (4884 metres), is the only one of the Seven Summits to require technical rock climbing. Masha reached the summit within three hours from the base camp on March 4, 2016. Carstensz Pyramid lies in the west of New Guinea in Indonesia. It was first climbed by Heinrich Harrer (of Seven Years in Tibet fame), Philip Temple, Russell Kippaz and Albertus Huizenga in 1962.

Elbrus

What is the highest mountain in Europe? Mont Blanc? Wrong! It is a classic pub quiz question. Elbrus is in fact the highest, standing at 18,510 feet (5642 metres). It lies in Russia's Caucasus mountains, close to the Georgia and Armenia borders, and was first climbed by Crauford Grove and Peter Knubel in 1874. Masha reached the summit on March 10, 2016, just six days after summiting Carstensz Pyramid.

North Pole

The most northernmost point of the earth is uniquely challenging to reach because it is located on constantly shifting, 2-3 metre thick sea ice in the middle of the Arctic Ocean. Roald Amundsen is believed to have been the first to attain the pole.

Everest

The tallest mountain on earth, with a summit at 29,035 feet (8848 metres). Everest sits on the border between China and Nepal in the centre of the Himalayas. It is the toughest of the Seven Summits to climb, featuring avalanches, exceptional altitude and 100 mph winds. Sir Edmund Hilary and Tenzing Norgay only conquered it in 1953 after many failed attempts. Masha will be flying into Kathmandu in April to join her expedition partner, American pro-endurance athlete Colin O'Brady in an unguided sherpa-supported ascent.

Denali

The highest mountain in North America – also known as Mount McKinley – is 20,310 feet (6190 metres) high and lies in Alaska. It is one of the hardest of the Seven Summits to climb, with hazardous weather throughout the year because it is so far north – it lies at 63° N. It was first climbed in 1913 by Hudson Stock, Harry Karstens, Walter Harper and Robert Tatum. Masha will attempt to scale it via the technically challenging and rarely attempted Cassin route.

Masha's schedule

October 23 2015	Kilimanjaro*	Africa	19,340 feet / 5895 metres
December 5 2015	Vinson Massif*	Antarctica	16,050 feet / 4892 metres
December 15 2015	South Pole*	Antarctica	
January 31 2016	Aconcagua*	South America	22,841 feet / 6962 metres
March 4 2016	Carstensz Pyramid*	Australasia	16,024 feet / 4884 metres
March 10 2016	Mt. Elbrus*	Europe	18,510 feet / 5642 metres
March 31 - April 15 2016	North Pole		
April 16 - May 31 2016	Everest	Asia	29,035 feet / 8848 metres
June 1 – June 15 2016	Denali	North America	20,310 feet / 6190 metres



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