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ITCHING TO CLIMB

BARBARA JAMES

From instructing in the Snowdonia hills and climbing 500m Dolomite rock faces - some were first feminine and first British ascents - to training infantry soldiers, exploring the Falkland Islands and gaining a Private Pilot's Licence, this is a travel autobiography full of excitement.

With inherited eczema and allergies Barbara James disliked being different from her classmates. Luckily the severity of her eczema had lessened when a teacher introduced her to the Snowdonia hills, but always her sweat has made her scratch. After teaching in a secondary school, with weekends spent in mountains, in 1964 she became a full time mountaineering instructor and a mountain rescue first aider in North Wales.

1976 brought divorce and job loss until she became the first and she believes the only woman civilian to be employed by the MOD. To teach the theory of weapons and other subjects at the Infantry Junior Leaders Battalion in Folkestone she participated in some Northern Ireland training, went through Check Point Charlie before the wall came down, learned to fire a 7.62mm self-loading rifle and led expeditions to St Kilda.

When retired she was told that she was the second person, and first female, to go alone to the magical Falkland Islands after the conflict. Then her 50th birthday present to herself was to gain a Private Pilot's Licence and to fly 40 hours solo in a Cessna around Florida.

Surviving, alone, the evenings in Tenerife's Playa de Las Américas was another challenge, but the solace of the magical El Teide National Park and the spontaneous kindness of the Canarians ensured her return. Her Spanish improved when she rented an apartment in Adeje village, learned to play the guitar in their night school class and later she was invited to participate in El Pasión, their very moving televised re-enactment of the crucifixion. Her home has been in Gwynedd for over forty years.

She hopes that this book will both increase the lucky non-sufferers' understanding of eczema and allergies and focus attention on the need for eczema trained nurses in GP surgeries.

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