



PRESS PACK

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RICHARD PARKS'

737

CHALLENGE

GENERAL BIOG

Richard David Parks (born 14 August 1977) is a former Wales international rugby union player. A back row forward, he made a name for himself as a hard and prolific tackler.

Representing Wales and The Barbarians, he also won the Principality Cup with Pontypridd and The Powergen Cup with Leeds.

Parks was born in Pontypridd and played for Welsh Youth before going overseas to South Africa where he was invited to play for Natal Province U19's. Back in Wales, Richard played for Newport RFC, Pontypridd, Celtic Warriors and Leeds Tykes. He then moved to the South of France and played for USA Perpignan before moving back to Wales and signing for Newport Gwent Dragons, his home region.

In May 2009 he was forced to retire from rugby due to a shoulder injury.

In December 2010, Richard will start a pioneering 7 month race to climb the highest mountain on each of the world's continents and venture to The South and Geographical North Poles.

When successful Richard will become the first ever person to stand on the continental summits and all 3 poles (The South Pole, The Geographic North Pole and the summit of Everest) in the same calendar year, and set a new benchmark in the climbing of the 7 Summits.

**THE 737 CHALLENGE:
7 SUMMITS, 3 POLES, 7 MONTHS.
A WORLD FIRST.**

For more information visit: www.737challenge.com



THE STUFF YOU NEED TO KNOW...

Richard Parks' 737 Challenge is a pioneering 7 month race to climb the highest mountain on each of the world's continents and venture to The South and Geographical North Poles.

On the 12th December 2010, 100 years after Robert Falcon Scott's 1910 Terra Nova expedition set sail from Cardiff, Richard Parks will also leave Cardiff to embark on his inspirational and epic journey from a career ending injury to the most hostile places on the planet.

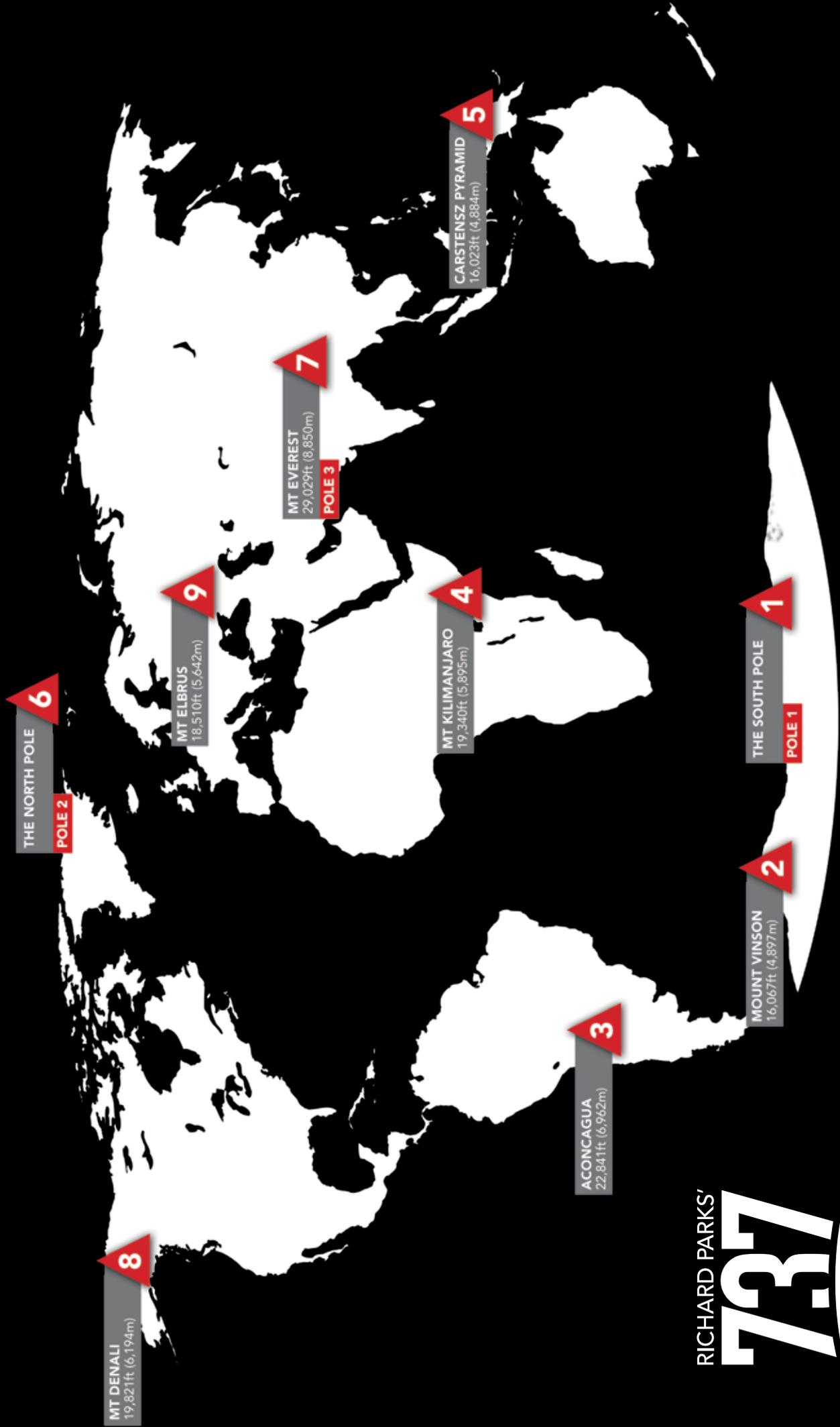
Richard will be joined on parts of his gruelling 7 month expedition by **Sir Ranulph Fiennes**, Olympic rower **Steve Williams OBE** and Marie Curie nurse **Jan Suart**.

When successful Richard will become the first ever person to stand on the continental summits and all 3 poles (The South Pole, The Geographic North Pole and the summit of Everest) in the same calendar year, and set a new benchmark in the climbing of the 7 Summits.

**THE 737 CHALLENGE:
7 SUMMITS, 3 POLES, 7 MONTHS.
A WORLD FIRST.**

Raising funds in aid of:





6
THE NORTH POLE
POLE 2

9
MT ELBRUS
18,510ft (5,642m)

7
MT EVEREST
29,029ft (8,850m)
POLE 3

4
MT KILIMANJARO
19,340ft (5,895m)

5
CARSTENSZ PYRAMID
16,023ft (4,884m)

1
THE SOUTH POLE
POLE 1

2
MOUNT VINSON
16,067ft (4,897m)

3
ACONCAGUA
22,841ft (6,962m)

8
MT DENALI
19,821ft (6,194m)

RICHARD PARKS'
7.3.7
CHALLENGE

THE 7 SUMMITS...

MT. VINSON	ANTARCTICA	4,897M/15,670FT
ACONCAGUA	SOUTH AMERICA	6,962M/22,267FT
KILIMANJARO	AFRICA	5,895M/18,864FT
CARSTENSZ PYRAMID	INDONESIA	4,884M/15,629FT
MT. EVEREST	ASIA	8,845M/28,320FT
DENALI	NORTH AMERICA	6,194M/20,320FT
MT. ELBRUS	EUROPE	5,642M/18,054FT

THE 3 POLES...

THE SOUTH POLE

Richard will venture using skis to The South Pole, starting just after 88° Latitude – the point at which Sir Ernest Shackleton’s South Pole expedition failed, battling the last 97 Nautical Miles (170km) to The South Pole.

THE GEOGRAPHIC NORTH POLE

Olympian Steve Williams OBE will team up with Richard to venture the last degree north, 105km to The Geographic North Pole. Combating one of the most hostile environments on earth, they must negotiate the hazardous and changeable polar ice cap and face the prospect of swimming between icebergs.

THE SUMMIT OF EVEREST

Regarded as the world’s third pole, this will be the crossover point between the 7 Summits.

Steve will also join Richard on his ascent of Mount Everest, the highest mountain on earth, which captures the imagination of every climber across the globe. They will follow Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay’s 1953 first ascent route via the South Col from Nepal.



**THE 737 CHALLENGE:
7 SUMMITS, 3 POLES, 7 MONTHS.
A WORLD FIRST.**

WHY...



Richard had been a professional rugby player, representing Wales and The Barbarians, winning the Principality Cup with Pontypridd and The Powergen Cup with Leeds.

However, last May he was given the devastating news that he would never play again due to a shoulder injury.

This brutal blow forced Richard to reassess his direction in life. A journey with emotions understood by many due to the recent economic recession.

"Lying in bed following my second operation to repair my shoulder, I was suddenly faced with the reality of life without professional rugby, which had been at the centre of my entire adult life. I became scared of the unknown future that lay ahead. I suffered with a mixture of frustration, despair and even anger dominating my thoughts. I was deeply depressed. It was a dark place for me.

"I happened to be reading Sir Ranulph Fiennes' book, which somehow became intertwined with a phrase from my Nan's funeral The Horizon is only the Limit of our Sight. It had an immediate effect on me, helping me find the courage and mental strength to face my fears and my future head on. Reading about Sir Ranulph's experiences had a profound effect on me. The mental, physical and technical challenges of Polar travel and climbing the 7 summits captured my imagination. At the very moment I discovered the 7 summits, I had decided that I was going to climb them!

"I've learnt that our lives will always be made up of many chapters. We can never go back and we cannot foresee our future. However, we can take charge of how we choose to live and what we think, right now in the present.

"The support that I received from both Sir Ranulph Fiennes himself and from the organisations that have become closely associated with the early days of the challenge – Jagged Globe, limegreentangerine and Rab has been amazing. So, with their input, my 737 Challenge was born. 7 Summits, 3 Poles in 7 Months. A World First... awesome!"



RAISING FUNDS IN AID OF:

Marie Curie
Cancer Care



Richard Parks' 737 Challenge aims to raise £1million for Marie Curie Cancer Care. Richard's life, like so many people has been affected by cancer and his father Derek is a cancer survivor.

Marie Curie Cancer Care provides hands-on nursing care, totally free, to give terminally ill people the choice of being cared for and dying at home, supported by the people they love. Marie Curie is also the largest provider of hospice beds outside the NHS, providing specialist care to the large number of terminally ill people who wish to be cared for in a hospice setting.

Your kind support of the 737 Challenge would therefore have a significant impact on the lives of many terminally ill people and their families.

"Like so many of us, my family has been rocked by cancer and therefore I'm very proud to be raising funds for Marie Curie Cancer Care. I'm sure that at times things will get very tough for me on the challenge. Part of my motivation and strength to carry on moving forward will come from my memories of certain friends and family that I've sadly lost.

"My decision to support Marie Curie Cancer Care was an easy and obvious one. I believe that our £1million fundraising target is fully justified by the global scale of this unique record breaking challenge."



THE TRAINING...

Until 2009 Richard had never climbed a mountain before. His first experience at high altitude was Mt Blanc in August 2009 and also his first training expedition with Jagged Globe.

Since then and under Jagged Globe's guidance, Richard has developed a lifetime of mountain and polar skills. He has undertaken a gruelling fitness programme tailored by **Kevin Morgan**, former Welsh International fullback and now assistant conditioner for the Ospreys.

Full details of Richard's training and challenge can be seen at www.737challenge.com

Richard has already summited Denali in Alaska, one of the 7 summits he will climb.

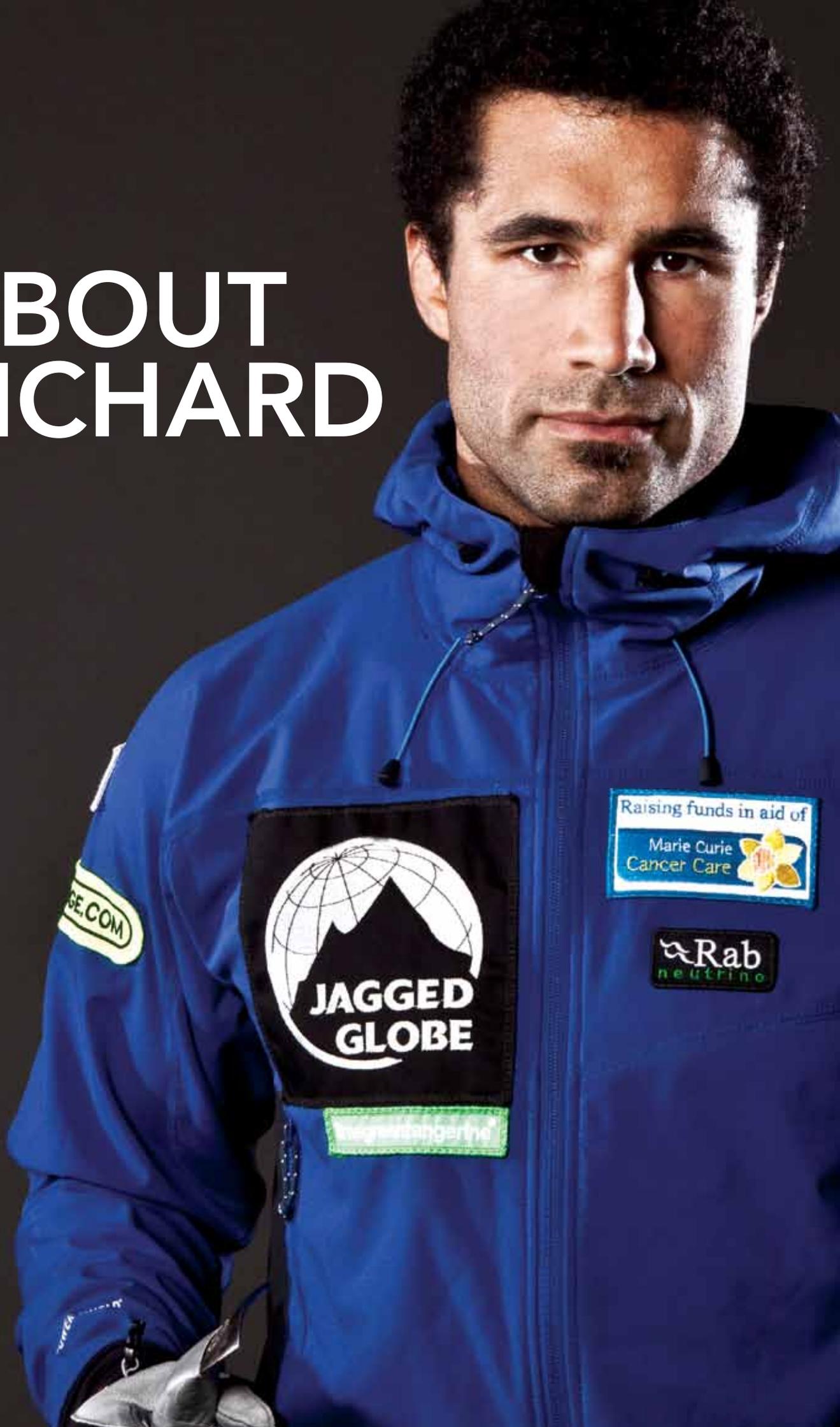
"I will be at my weakest for this leg of the challenge so I felt it important to have intimate knowledge of the route on Denali. The mountain was in the worst condition it had been for a long time due to a very cold winter and high winds scouring the upper mountain.

"We battled temperatures ranging from +28 to -30 degrees celsius, spent 7 days stuck in our tents in a storm at 4,300m / 14,000ft and endured an **18 hour summit climb** in zero visibility and -45 windchill conditions. However, thanks to the strong teamwork of my three man rope team, I successfully reached the summit. That May only 19% of climbers on the mountain summited. It was an awesome experience and really valuable test of my ability to perform in extreme environments."

It was crucial that Richard climbed this mountain as part of his training as he will start this leg after completing the gruelling North Pole and Mount Everest back to back.

In September 2010 Richard and Steve Williams ventured to the Himalayas, dodging avalanches whilst climbing Cho Oyu in Tibet as preparation for climbing Mount Everest. **They spent a month in the Himalayas on Cho Oyu**, which is the **6th highest mountain in the world** at 8,201m/26,906ft.

ABOUT RICHARD



ABOUT RICHARD...



THE EARLY YEARS

Richard was born on 14 August 1977 in Pontypridd to Jamaican mother Lee and Welsh father Derek Parks. Richard grew up Newport, Wales and attended Rougemont and Montmouth Schools.

Richard first started playing Rugby at the age of 11 at Rougemont School and progressed quickly through the school ranks playing at flanker throughout.

He was selected for **Welsh Schools** at **Under 18** level and then had a brief spell with Newport youth before spending a year in South Africa in 1996 at Michaelhouse, the internationally renowned school for senior boys. Richard competed for the first team at Michaelhouse whilst he studied **A-level chemistry** in order to gain entry to **Cardiff University to study dentistry**.

Whilst in South Africa, Richard was invited to join the **Natal Under 19's academy** but this would have involved committing to attend University in South Africa. Richard always had the desire to play for Wales, therefore he chose to return home to take a contract up with Newport Rugby Football Club, and sign his **first professional contract** as a rugby player.

NEWPORT RFC

In his first year at Newport RFC (1996-97) he was selected to play for the Welsh sevens in Tokyo, Japan and in his second year at the age of 20 years old, Richard was called up to train with the Welsh senior team. At the end of this season (**1997-98**) Richard was **voted most promising player of the year by his club winning the Arthur Boucher Award**.

Richard's 3rd season with Newport RFC saw him struck down with injury. He missed most of the season after suffering a stress fracture of his spine. Breaking his back resulted in Richard missing the opportunity to gain Welsh honours at an Under 21 level.

After taking longer to recover than anticipated Richard was released from his contract at **Newport RFC** after **62 appearances** and finished the season playing University Rugby for Cardiff Meds.

THE TURNING POINT

Despite this being one of the lowest points in his career, ironically, it was to be the turning point too. After winning the **player of the tournament at the The Times University rugby competition**, Richard was recommended to the then coach of Pontypridd (Dennis John) by the University coach at the time. John drafted Richard in to play the last game of the season for Pontypridd to cover an injury hit squad.

A strong performance earned him a second shot at professional rugby.

ABOUT RICHARD...

PONTYPRIDD & PLAYING FOR WALES

Richard was then signed by Pontypridd for the following season. At this time, Pontypridd were one of the strongest clubs in Wales, however during the summer of 1999 when he signed, many top players and the existing coach Dennis John left, leaving an inexperienced squad of players and a young coach in charge. Halfway through his second season, in 2001 a new coach and director of rugby was brought in and this was this catalyst that turned the team around. The change in management and momentum saw the following 2001-02 season provide much success for Richard and the Ponty side.

In 2001 Richard represented the Welsh sevens in the Rugby World Cup Sevens in Argentina.

During that 2001-02 season Pontypridd and Richard went on to **win the Principality Cup** and make the final of the Parker Pen Shield competition where they lost narrowly to Sale Sharks.

Many of the Pontypridd squad including Richard were called up to represent Wales on a **tour to South Africa**. It was here on tour versus South Africa in the Freestate Stadium, Bloemfontein that 24-year-old Richard earned his **first full international cap on 8th June 2002**.

RICHARD BECAME THE 1001ST PLAYER TO REPRESENT HIS COUNTRY WALES.

During the next season Richard was selected for the autumn international series where he gained his **second cap against Fiji**.

A final season at Pontypridd continued and Richard remained in the Welsh squad. **He was named in the 6 nations squad but was not capped.**

During the summer of 2003 Richard was selected in the preliminary **World Cup** squad and added to his **2 caps with games against Scotland and Ireland** but missed out on final section to the world cup in Australia.

CELTIC WARRIORS

In 2003 the WRU then created the regions by amalgamating, electing to reduce the then top tier of Welsh Professional Rugby from nine clubs into five regions.

Richard and Pontypridd finally found themselves in a partnership with Bridgend RFC, forming the Celtic Warriors that would represent the whole of the South Wales Valleys region.

Richard played the whole of that new look 2003-04 season out of position at number 8 due to injuries in the squad. **The warriors were the only team to beat Wasps that campaign who went on to win the Heineken Cup.**

The team was disbanded at the end of the season, this is when Richard joined the then **Welsh head coach Phil Davies at Leeds Tykes** (now known as Leeds Carnegie).



ABOUT RICHARD...

LEEDS & PERPIGNAN

After a difficult start to the 2004-05 season through injury, Richard became an influential member of the Leeds squad and was at times named as **Vice Captain**.

At the beginning of 2005 following injuries to key players, Leeds were bottom of the Zurich Premiership and some way adrift of their rivals. Despite the threat of relegation they made it to their first ever **Powergen Cup final in 2005**. Richard and the **Tykes defeated Bath at Twickenham** by 20-12 to claim their first ever trophy and making club history.

Following the cup win they went on to win five straight games and avoided the drop by finishing eighth that season (2004-05). The following season (2005-06) saw the Tykes lose their first eight games in three different competitions. Following more injuries Leeds were relegated that year exactly a year to the day after they claimed the Powergen Cup. However, Richard had one of his best **Heineken Cup** campaigns and this led to him being recruited by **USA Perpignan** and a move to play rugby in the south of France.

Richard spent a year in Perpignan, with ambitions of playing for the best club in Europe and playing for Wales again but wasn't getting enough game time. Playing for Wales again was his main drive and ambition, so Richard decided to return to Wales for the 2007-08 season and sign for **Newport Gwent Dragons**.

NEWPORT GWENT DRAGONS

During the first half of the new season at Rodney Parade, Richard played really well getting himself back into contention for the Welsh squad. On Boxing Day that year he then tore his knee ligaments. This marked the beginning of Richard's injury problems, which led to his retirement from rugby.

Early in his second season with the Dragons (2008-09) **Richard injured his shoulder in a tackle**. Unaware of the severity of the injury, Richard continued to play and then had an operation over Christmas to repair his shoulder. He returned to action at the beginning of the year but his shoulder problem reoccurred. It was at this point, in May 2009 and after trying many different courses of treatment to repair his shoulder, Richard was advised the damage to his shoulder was irreversible and following the second operation on his shoulder that year, he was advised he should not play rugby anymore. **He had made 30 appearances for the Dragons**.

RICHARD RETIRED FROM RUGBY
ON 26TH MAY 2009 AGED 31.



ABOUT RICHARD...

LIFE AFTER RUGBY

This brutal blow forced Richard to reassess his direction in life. Lying in bed following his second operation to repair his shoulder and whilst reading **Sir Ranulph Fiennes' book**, Richard's imagination was captured by the mental, physical and technical challenges of Polar travel and also by the 7 summits.

This somehow became intertwined with a phrase from his Nan's funeral;

THE HORIZON IS ONLY THE LIMIT OF OUR SIGHT

and at the very moment Richard discovered the 7 summits, he had decided that he was going to climb them.

Alongside mountaineering expedition world-leaders **Jagged Globe**, Richard developed the idea of a new world first challenge – The 737 Challenge.

HOBBIES & HOME LIFE

Richard lives in **Newport** with his parents having moved home to help fund the training for his challenge.

One of Richard's passions is **motorcycles** and he loves watching **MotoGP**. His passion of bikes started at the age of 6 when he used to race motocross for the South Wales schoolboys scramble club and the Seven Valley schoolboy scramble club. He raced bikes until the age of 11 when he started playing rugby.

Richard has 2 half brothers and 2 half sisters. His sister Debbie lives in the US and his other siblings live in South Wales.

Richard loves his dog Ben who has been an integral part of Richard's training for the challenge! Richard can often be seen out running with Ben.





HISTORICAL FACTS & BREAKING RECORDS

As a mark of respect for, and celebration of British led Expeditions and **Great Brits**, The 737 Challenge will see Richard venture by foot to The South Pole, starting just after 88° Latitude - the point at which Sir Ernest Shackleton's South Pole expedition failed, battling the last 97 Nautical Miles (170km) to the Pole.

The 737 Challenge will also mark a **centenary from Robert Falcon Scott's 1910 Tera Nova Expedition** which set sail from Cardiff, Wales.

NOBODY HAS EVER STOOD ON THE CONTINENTAL SUMMITS AND ALL 3 POLES IN THE SAME CALENDAR YEAR.

Richard's first summit and leg 2 of the challenge will be Mount Vinson in Antarctica. Richard will be climbing a **new ground breaking route** on this mountain, which has never been climbed before.

GREAT BRITONS

During specific legs of the challenge, Richard will be joined by inspirational Great Britons...





STEVE WILLIAMS OBE

Steve Williams, OBE is a double Olympic Gold medallist in the rowing fours in two of the most emphatic Olympic races of all time, Athens and Beijing.

In **Athens 2004**, along side Sir Matthew Pinsent, James Cracknell and Ed Coode, Steve had an epic battle with the Canadians, who were as determined to win as the British. After 2000 meters the British prevailed on the finish line getting their boat in front to win by the narrowest of margins, just 0.08 of a second or, as the Daily Mail reported, "the length of a Crunchie bar".

Four years later, Steve was back to defend his Olympic title in Beijing. The final was the ultimate test for the crew to hold their form and nerve as the Australians shot out to a commanding early lead. For almost the entire race their relentless pushes made no impact until, in the dying strokes, the **British "never-say-die" spirit prevailed to allow them to take a glorious Gold.**

In a 10 year career at the top of one of the most demanding sports Steve has also won four World Championship titles, has a trophy cabinet full of international honours and has enjoyed many other highlights including sustaining a **three year unbeaten run of 27 international races.**

Steve's Olympic dreams were almost derailed just as he started when in 2000 he missed out on selection for the British Olympic rowing team for Sydney. Going instead as a 'travelling spare' his job was to carry the oars and watch from the riverbank. As humbling and painful as this experience was for Steve it was also his breakthrough as it proved to be a journey of self-discovery that he has never forgotten and a critical part of his learning how to win.

Steve will be joining Richard on the North Pole and Mount Everest legs of the challenge.

"It is a fantastic opportunity to be able to join Richard on part of his 737 Challenge. His 'World First' adventure will be an epic journey and it is a privilege to be asked to join him on some of the toughest parts of the Challenge. It will be a whole new set of challenges for me but I am relishing the opportunity to test myself to the full in a completely new world."

Steve Williams OBE





SIR RANULPH FIENNES

Sir Ranulph Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes, 3rd Baronet OBE was born in Windsor, Berkshire the 7 March 1944.

He was brought up in South Africa where he remained until the age of 12 when he returned to England to be educated at Eton, after which he joined the British Army.

Fiennes served for eight years in his father's regiment, the Royal Scots Greys, and was later seconded to the Special Air Service. He went on to join the army of the Sultan of Oman where he received the country's Bravery Medal in 1971.

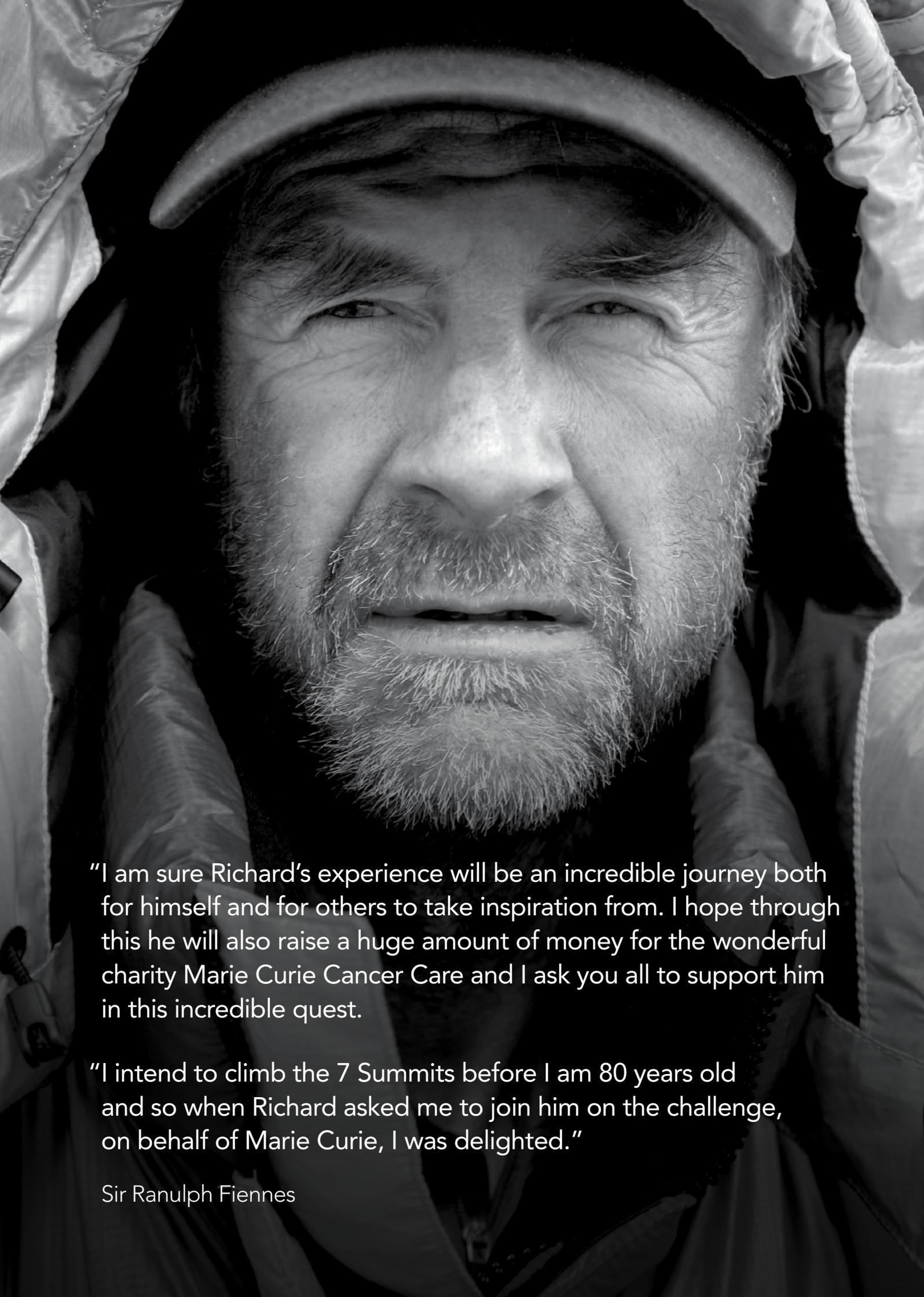
Sir Ranulph married his childhood sweetheart, Virginia Pepper (Ginny), in 1970 and together they launched a series of record breaking expeditions that kept them ahead of their international rivals for three decades. Ginny died of cancer in 2004. In March 2005, he was married for a second time to Louise Millington; they **honeymooned at Everest Base Camp**. They have a daughter, Elizabeth.

Fiennes was the **first man to reach both poles** by surface travel and the first to cross the Antarctic Continent unsupported.

He has led over 30 expeditions including the first polar circumnavigation of the Earth, and in 2003 he ran **7 marathons in 7 days on 7 continents**.

Sir Ranulph has raised over **£13million** to date for various UK charities including Marie Curie Cancer Care for whom he has raised **£5.6million** after successfully climbing the North Face of the Eiger in March 2007, and attempting to climb Everest (Nepal-side) to within 400m from the summit in May 2008.

In 1993 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for 'human endeavour and charitable services'. According to the Guinness Book of World Records he is the '**greatest living explorer**' and was also named Best Sportsman in the 2007 Great Briton Awards.



"I am sure Richard's experience will be an incredible journey both for himself and for others to take inspiration from. I hope through this he will also raise a huge amount of money for the wonderful charity Marie Curie Cancer Care and I ask you all to support him in this incredible quest.

"I intend to climb the 7 Summits before I am 80 years old and so when Richard asked me to join him on the challenge, on behalf of Marie Curie, I was delighted."

Sir Ranulph Fiennes



JANET SUART

Janet has been a Marie Curie nurse for 13 years.

Janet was born in Carmarthen in West Wales and moved to Dinas Powys at the age of 7 where she met her future husband Allan in the school playground. She was educated at her Our Lady's Convent School in Cardiff. At the age of 14 her eldest brother was killed in a work accident, which led to her career in nursing. At 17 she moved to London to train as a nurse at St Thomas' Hospital. Once qualified Janet returned to Wales to work at St David's Hospital and qualified as a midwife. She married her childhood sweetheart at 24 and after 47 years of barely being part, they are still happily married.

After a brief spell living in Bedfordshire, Janet and Allan moved to South Africa where they spent the next 10 years working and starting their family. They have three children.

Janet joined Marie Curie in 1997 after returning from South Africa. She is based at the Penarth Hospice. A keen walker, Janet trained on Pen Y Fan and Mount Snowdon before taking on her first challenge in 2006, climbing Mount Toubkal, the highest peak in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco (4,167m). She enjoys taking on challenging walks and climbs and has also completed the famous Yorkshire three peaks.

Janet will be joining Richard on Mount Kilimanjaro, leg 4 of the 737 Challenge. After returning from Kilimanjaro she will remain in training to take on a Marie Curie challenge to the Great Wall of China in September 2011.

"I am very excited to be joining Richard on his 737 Challenge, it's an incredible adventure for me to be part of such a challenge.

"Originally I met with Richard at the hospice to just chat about his challenge, I was so inspired by his total commitment, passion and dedication not to mention his bubbly character, I knew this was one challenge I was not going to be able to say no to! I am thrilled to be climbing Kilimanjaro with the team, I know it's not going to be easy but I feel honoured to be part of the 737 Challenge and help raise such a fantastic amount for Marie Curie Cancer Care."

Jan Suart



737 CHALLENGE LANDMARK DATES

02 DECEMBER 2010

Official 737 Challenge leaving gala dinner event, National Museum Cardiff.

12 DECEMBER 2010

Richard officially starts the 737 Challenge and departs on his journey from Wales to Antarctica.

27 DECEMBER 2010

737 Challenge charity rugby match, Newport Gwent Dragons v Cardiff Blues, Rodney Parade.

01 JANUARY 2011

New years Day – Richard estimated to reach the South Pole

01 MARCH 2011 St David's Day

16 MAY - 22ND MAY 2011

Historically the best time to summit Mount Everest

26 MAY 2011

Exactly 2 years since Richard Parks retired from professional rugby



ESTIMATED SCHEDULE

These are the estimated dates of each leg of the challenge. These dates are subject to change constantly depending on weather and Richard's progress. Please always check these schedules with Tracy Pinder, PR Manager or visit 737challenge.com for up to date news.

12 Dec – 02 Jan 2011	LEG 1	The South Pole
05 Jan – 19 Jan	LEG 2	Mount Vinson
21 Jan – 09 Feb	LEG 3	Aconcagua
12 Feb – 21 Feb	LEG 4	Kilimanjaro
24 Feb – 18 Mar	LEG 5	Carstensz Pyramid
01 Apr	Steve Williams OBE joins the challenge	
01 Apr – 12 Apr	LEG 6	The North Pole
14 Apr – 31 May	LEG 7	Mount Everest
31 May	Steve Williams OBE returns back to UK	
01 Jun – 12 Jun	Mount Everest contingency	
14 Jun – 30 Jun	LEG 8	Mount Denali
03 Jul – 18 Jul	LEG 9	Mount Elbrus

For more information, quotes, copy and high-resolution imagery or video content, please contact:

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