

KIM SCHREIBER

# OFF TRACK

PASSION FOR TRAIL RUNNING



CALWEY





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ULTRA MARATHON



# RUNNING—MY LOYAL COMPANION ALONG MY JOURNEY TO MYSELF

I'm a runner. Even a runner with heart and soul, although I know that alongside that identity, I carry and value many others inside me. I'm a city kid, a daughter, sister, partner, friend; author, music-lover, dreamer, podcaster. Yet running made me who I am today. It shaped me, helped me grow, made me critical and questioning, and tore off my mask of insecurity. When I run, I've always been able to simply be myself, losing myself in the simple rhythm of the steps. Sound cheesy? Well, that's exactly what this book is about: a love letter to running.

I wouldn't describe myself as a particularly straightforward person. A good friend of mine once described me as "lovable, but complicated." Sounds about right. I have my quirks, and at 30, I've learned to love and accept them. But it wasn't always like that, and while figuring out who I am, I often felt overwhelmed, sometimes even insecure. Insecurity can make you trust your gut less and

question yourself more. I kept adapting, looking to others, and often lost myself in trendy or shallow ideals. At that time, running became my safe space and, at first, also a way to chase after those ideals—quite literally.

From an early age, my mother was the gateway to running for my sister Lisa and me. Every day she laced up her running shoes and went out, tireless in maintaining her beloved morning routine, which was non-negotiable. I saw how my mother found her own rhythm in running, and since I inherited not only her endurance but also her discipline, I followed her lead. I ran. No sports watch or fancy gadgets, but always with music in my ears—and that's still true today. Back then I had no idea that I would ever need to distinguish between road and trail running. I ran for the sake of running; the "where" didn't matter. And in a sense, that's probably still true today.

**Finding myself**

Over the years, the role that running has played in my life has changed again and again. When I moved to Bamberg as a student, I joined a running club. Originally, my aim was to meet new people in a new city. Had I nottaken that step, who knows where I would be today—probably not in athletics. The club enabled me to meet like-minded people, but also my first coach, Felix. He eyed my worn-out running shoes and lack of sports watch with suspicion, but apparently saw potential in my running. Suddenly, a cherished routine and an inner compulsion morphed into a detailed training program, planned and structured, and competitions soon came along. I was unexpectedly fine with the way things were developing and quickly noticed that although I was making progress, I was falling short in other areas of life. I wasn't exactly a normal student. Alcohol, partying into the small hours, nursing a hangover in class—not for me. It may sound nerdy and as if I was missing out on a phase of life, but I saw it as a carefully weighed sacrifice and a path that, in retrospect, suited me and my introverted nature very well. I prefer to go to bed early, so accordingly, I like to get up early. I hardly ever drink alcohol, but recently I've been getting into alcohol-free beer. I have never tried smoking cigarettes or weed—which earned me a skeptical raise of the eyebrow during a job interview for a student café in Bamberg. I didn't miss a thing. Nevertheless, I learned from an early stage that my commitment could be an unintentional hindrance. A good friend once confessed to me when drunk that people stayed away from me if they want to let loose at parties, because my scrupulous behavior unintentionally communicated: *I can abstain and show respect for myself—but can you?* It didn't matter at those moments that this was never my intention, and although it hurt me deeply, I learned to deal with this kind of comment and to remain true to myself and my own

ideas. Today I'm very proud that I walked that tough line.

**Interdependent worlds**

Over time, my running became more professional and my ambition grew. Races became a regular thing, even though I had always sworn I wasn't the competitive type. Now I know that in fact, I was really scared of competing and losing. But I think that attitude is pretty normal, especially for people who expect a lot from themselves and their performance. I had to find the balance between seeking to be perfect and accepting that perfectionism is neither desirable nor human. Now, more than eight years later, I've finally arrived. In 2019, I signed my sponsorship deal with adidas and have been running under the three-stripe banner ever since. Probably the first and most important step toward a pro athlete career. This is the perfect spot to sidestep into writing and my second passion: because being a sponsored athlete was never really the plan.

**“I had to learn how to find the balance between seeking to be perfect and accepting that perfectionism is neither desirable nor human.”**

As a child, I wasn't a bookworm—totally unlike my big sister Lisa. I preferred playing on my Gameboy or reading comic books, so basically looking at pictures rather than reading. I loved building Lego and imagining I was part of all kinds of worlds: detective, superhero, master of the elements. My creativity allowed me to disappear into my own thoughts and invent stories. That was all fine in German class until we had to write summaries, read Goethe's Faust, and all that kind of stuff. No amount of creativity could save me then. Yet my love of writing and storytelling stayed with me. After high school and a few internships in the media industry, I chose a bachelor's degree in communication and German studies at the University of



Author Kim working in a café. Besides being an athlete, she is a freelance copywriter and author.

Bamberg. I pictured myself strutting around in an open-plan office in a smart business suit and heels, with a deskful of Post-its and a headful of ideas. My goal was advertising or journalism at a big newspaper, to really live up to my last name (Schreiber means “writer” in German). I wanted to create value with my words and inspire people with my stories. Even back then, running helped me structure my days and clear my head. If I hit a creative block, I'd head out for a run—and that would be when I'd get my best ideas. While studying, I worked as a student assistant and copywriter at a small ad agency, and began to step up my running and increase my focus. Looking back, it was a slow process. At first, I ran when I couldn't write anymore. At some point, I only wrote when I was taking a break from running.

So I built myself two lives on a path I am still following today: as a runner who writes, and a writer who runs. Perhaps that's the best way to put it.

**A way of life**

Although writing and running were initially a great fit, there came a point where I had to pick a path and let the other choice tag along for a while. In 2021, I realized I simply didn't have the capacity for two careers that were both incredibly time-consuming and tough businesses that demanded a lot of commitment. I quit my job as an editorial assistant at a start-up and went freelance: as a columnist—but first and foremost as a professional trail runner.



Kim Schreiber just before the start of a race, focused on the final preparations and totally zoned in on what's coming next.

Trail running—running far from paved roads, out in the wild—is what this book is about. Before I wrap up my little speech, I'd like to share why I hit the trails, why I still can't get enough of running in nature after more than eight years, and what you can expect from the following pages.

I ran my first trail race in 2017. At the Koasamarsch in Ebbs in Tyrol, Austria, I covered 21 kilometers (13 miles) with about 1,000 me-

ters (3,280 feet) of elevation gain and finished as the third woman. As a kid, I never shared my mom's love for hiking. Quite the opposite, in fact; I couldn't understand why anyone would put themselves through that kind of exertion on purpose. When I discovered trail running, it was still a very new niche sport. I often trained in the woods and loved the peace in the natural environment, but it wasn't until the Koasamarsch that I realized this was actually a separate disci-

pline—and that I was actually pretty good at it. I had the leg strength, I had a feel for the mountains and how to move there thanks to my mom's persistence, and years of running had given me solid endurance. I was ready for the trails, and open to all the possibilities the sport had to offer.

Over the past few years, I've seen so many parts of the world that would probably have stayed off my radar if it hadn't been for running. Cape Town in South Africa, Cappadocia in Turkey, Madeira in Portugal, La Palma, Grindelwald, Chamonix, Istria, and California. I got to explore trails and landscapes, meet amazing people and their cultures, and make a name for myself in a sport that's young and full of energy. Along the way, I explored my strengths, announced my opinions on stage, was actively involved, and proclaimed my support for issues such as sustainability and equality in sports. I also learned what it means to host a podcast and be part of a passionate community. But most of all, I developed my strength not only as a runner—I discovered more and more of myself as Kimi. Running could not have given me a finer gift, and I'm certain that it is the many-faceted variety of the trails that has made me who I am today.

Trail running is booming. A statement that you may have heard a lot over the past few years. I get the hype, I really do. It's a sport that invites you to dream, that challenges you, that makes the impossible possible. Trail running is honest. It's just you and your two legs carrying you over all those kilometers of distance and meters of elevation to the finish. It's a journey to yourself. Not always an easy one, but one that offers the rewards of epic views and new insights at the finish.

I know what I'm talking about. In this book, I'd like to invite you to join me in a sport that's so much more than just running. Get

ready for pure passion, energy, and natural beauty, for adventure, sports history, and a visual journey deep into the soul of a growing and unique community that brings us to the heart of something truly wonderful: the world of the mountains.

Kim Schreiber



# WHY DO WE PUT OURSELVES THROUGH THIS?

## An ode to trail running

I am convinced that endurance sports are in a league. There's something so meditative about performing the same motion for hours and covering distances that some people only manage by car. Only recently, a friend jokingly suggested I could run to his wedding—it was only a few hundred kilometers away, after all. (I politely declined.) Although the appeal of ultrarunning is partly about notching up exceptional distances, that isn't the only true "why" behind my passion for running. When I'm running, I come up with my best ideas, invent cool stories, and imagine all sorts of fantastic things. Out on the trail, I'm in my own universe, allowing myself to experience it all in my mind. I also review situations and encounters from real life, and process emotions when they emerge. After running, my mind is clear and I'm relaxed. And no matter how huge my inner couch potato was beforehand, after running, I al-

ways feel better. Moving your body relieves stress and provides a welcome boost of "happy hormones." In his book *Alone*, Daniel Schreiber writes: *"When you do nothing but put one foot in front of the other, your thoughts seem to find new paths. [...] A unique rhythm of thinking emerges, shaped by walking itself, the landscape, and your breath."* I couldn't have put it better myself.

Running is a process of mental healing and, in its simplest form of execution, is a brilliant boundary experience between tedious repetition and strenuous endurance. I believe it is this repetitive movement that many people dislike about running. There is no ball to kick, no stadium with spectators. Running in itself offers no variety, only an honest confrontation with an identical sequence of movements and the runner's personal level of fitness. For me, though, that simplicity is exactly what makes running so appealing. I'm not a fan of risky ex-

<sup>1</sup> DANIEL SCHREIBER: "ALONE", 2023, P. 34

periences that test my limits, and I don't want to train in a state of constant fear about whether I'll make it back in one piece. I'm not looking for a thrill or an adrenaline rush, but for hours of retreat into my own thoughts, physical exercise in the midst of nature, and a balance to the sedentary pursuit of writing. During chats with my teammates, on community runs, and even when reading the portraits in this book, I notice that running has often played a crucial role in self-discovery and overcoming an identity crisis. Take Dakota, for example, who found his original "why" while running in nature, or Ida, who feels most comfortable as "Ida the runner." Or my mother, who has been running in the early mornings for years because she craves the sanctuary provided by this habit, and everyone for whom trail running has opened up a whole new world. Running has always been part of the search for the self—myself. Running, in fact endurance sport in general, is primarily a sport for people who are comfortable being alone. For people who need time to themselves now and then. For people who have taken a while to find themselves and accept their own idiosyncrasies. For people who are self-disciplined and tend to be controlling. For people who secretly think more of themselves than they want to, or can, admit to others. For people who can quickly fall back into old patterns in team sports and far prefer to spend hours in a monologue with themselves. For people who dislike being the center of attention. Running is a form of self-therapy. A journey full of ups and downs and sometimes even delivering the answer to the question of who you really are.

**“Running is a process of mental healing and, in its simplest form of execution, is a brilliant borderline experience between tedious repetition and strenuous challenge.”**

### **An inward journey to the self**

Not always it needs to be such an existential exercise to understand why running, and especially trail running, has become a cherished passion for many people, and why they subject themselves to such an extreme experience again and again. First of all, it is important to distinguish between road running and trail running—and particularly in this context. Running on roads or through flat terrain involves doggedly facing straight ahead, toward the seemingly endless horizon. Road running is tough because it is simple, grueling, devoid of variety, and full of opportunities for comparison. It's about running on sidewalks, confronting traffic lights and pedestrians, and every single contact with the ground reminds us that asphalt is the arch-enemy of the knees. Trail running is different—at least partially. Running that avoids paved routes—which is the very definition of trail running—takes place in the variety par excellence that nature provides. Whether in the forest, on a hiking trail, or a loftier alpine route, trail running is multifaceted and therefore as attractive as it is challenging for body and mind. The diversity of the sport requires a colorful array of skills. A passion for endurance alone is not enough. What is important is the combination of strength, endurance, and, above all, the vital connection to the natural environment around us. Trail running is a feeling, a fusion with nature, and a connection to memories and emotions lying deep within us. Perhaps the sound of a cowbell in the distance recalls reminiscences of past family excursions, or crickets chirping in the meadow brings a rush of confidence and calm. I believe this is the essence of the sport, and the origin of the fascination with trail running. It's one reason why people immerse themselves in this extreme experience over and over again. It may even partly explain why people were especially drawn to trails and natural settings during the COVID-19 pandem-

ic. There was a great desire for solitude, and the vastness of nature was so enticing. People want to feel themselves, to be able to retreat and lose themselves in their own thoughts and the simple act of running. The small natural challenges thrown up as an inherent part of trail running imbue that simplicity with an accompanying sense of adventure and peace. Alongside the happiness hormones released during exercise, it is a thoroughly intoxicating combination.

Adventurousness is by no means confined to the mental side of an athletic life. Sports have so much to teach us, with characteristics such as perseverance, discipline, fighting spirit, fairness, how to deal with setbacks, and curiosity about other cultures. Over my years as a trail runner, I've gotten to know so many beautiful places and wonderful people. There's nothing better than exploring a new place by running through it, and few things are better conversation starters than a shared passion. That's how I found my tribe after moving for college. I joined a running club—like attracts like. Now I share this love for running with a much larger community. It doesn't matter where you're from, who you vote for, or what color your skin is—it's all about having a good time together or on your own. On the trails, in the outdoors, running. Trail running is the best of both worlds: a sport that invites you to retreat into yourself, but also be part of a community. It's true that endurance sports are in a league of their own. Yet the best part is that trail running excludes nothing and nobody, because the world of trail running is as open and diverse as the natural world we inhabit.

Trail running: the unique combination of discipline, endurance, and breathtaking experiences amid nature.



# PEOPLE & MOMENTS





Bianca Tarboton training on the hills around Cape Town.

# BIANCA TARBOTON: THE “MORE” INSIDE YOU

## The power of self-love

Every time I think of my friend Bianca, I hear the ocean. There's a salty tang in the air, the gorgeous evening light over Cape Town just before night falls, the throb of music, wild green nature—and so much laughter. Bianca is full of life, a wonderful example of authenticity, and a good friend who has inspired me many times; joyous, yet leaving room for self-doubt. Her story is about acceptance, self-love, and finding solace in unspoiled nature. It's about a young woman who seeks to do good—in her home of South Africa, and in her treatment of herself.

**“I run out of self-love, not self-hate.”**

## Not all running is the same

Bianca moved to Cape Town ten years ago. At the time she knew nothing about trail running, hiking around to explore her new home and its beautiful countryside. However, she was also running. Even as a child she entered many races, including cross-country. But her tendency to overthink brought on an early burnout. “I overdid it and let the pressure get to me too much, even aged 13. I quit competitive sports when I started high school.” Stepping away from racing helped Bianca find herself. She spent her first year at university in Cape Town living a totally normal student life, including partying now and then. Running remained a part of her life, albeit purely personal. It became her natural retreat. Bianca met her partner Rob, who introduced her to trail running. The ability to combine being in the mountains and running along trails not only unlocked a new sport for her, but soon brought her back to competitive running.

**“Even if the races should one day fall away, as long as I'm healthy and running in the mountains, I'm the happiest person in the world.”**

## The international trail scene

After running a few local races, Bianca quickly found her ambitious side again. When her current coach James approached her and suggested working together, she jumped at the chance. He spotted her potential, and before long the first sponsors came along. Bianca became a professional trail runner without ever really intending to.

November 2024 in Cape Town. Bianca is leading in the 21-kilometer (13-mile) course of Ultratrail Cape Town, once again demonstrating her ability for speed and proving how much she deserves her place in the elite rankings. In Cape Town, surrounded by family, friends, and the ocean, Bianca is overflowing with happiness and gratitude, beaming with her iconic, wide smile and exuding confidence and calmness. People celebrate her as an athlete and as an authentic woman, a true role model for many.

Bianca has already achieved a lot in her young life. In 2022, she joined the global adidas team. This marked the start of a journey beyond South Africa's borders into a world that still feels very big to her today.

That was the beginning of Bianca's international running career. She quickly realized how tough the level of competition in Europe was. Trail running is still a young sport, but a growing one, and the competition is constantly growing too. The constant comparisons began to dim Bianca's usu-

# ABOUT FREEDOM, COMMUNITY, AND RUNNING BEYOND THE EVERYDAY

This Callwey book captures the true spirit of running off the beaten path in all its facets: from portraits of influential personalities and legendary races to the most beautiful routes around the world. Powerful photography draws readers deep into untamed landscapes, while inspiring texts describe adventure, community, and the desire to push personal limits. A compact service section provides practical guidance, from key terms to hands-on tips for getting started in the sport.

Captivating portraits of key figures in the international trail running scene

Insights into the most important races, the most beautiful routes, and unforgettable moments in the sport

Practical guide to gear, terms, training, and nutrition

**CALLWEY**