

# Sir Ranulph Fiennes - Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know

Contributed by  
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There are very few people in the world like Sir Ranulph Fiennes. His life reads like a 'Boys Own' adventure, many will already be familiar with his exploits thanks to television and newspaper coverage as well as the other books he has written. This autobiography is like one of his expeditions: Ambitious in scope, packed with incident and revealing.

Fiennes begins his account of his extraordinary life as a young boy growing up in South Africa. The family returned to England when he was twelve, he attended Eton before joining the British Army, serving in his fathers old regiment the Royal Scots Greys. These early chapters help to set the scene and show the environment and surroundings that helped to shape the explorer.

The book picks up pace (and incident) when Fiennes describes his days in the SAS. Although an elite regiment, Fiennes has plenty of amusing anecdotes of the mischief that he and his contemporaries got up to. He was an explosives expert and this led to an infamous exploit where he and other conspirators planned to blow up an ugly concrete dam built by 20th Century Fox for the film 'Doctor Dolittle' in the picturesque village of Castle Combe. This episode is recounted with a mixture of nostalgia and matter-of-factness.

Fiennes moves on to his next adventure, seconded to the army of the Sultan of Oman. His accounts of the action seen there his thoughts and affectionate reminiscences of his fellow soldiers make this an interesting and frank account. You feel his lust for life and willingness to be wherever the action is as he leads several raids into rebel territory.

Upon returning to England Fiennes begins his new life as an explorer. There is an episode where he reveals that he was considered for the part of James Bond and made it to the audition stage, but his destiny lay elsewhere. The rest of the book is testament to his huge drive, energy and determination. He recalls and describes expeditions to both poles, another expedition to find the Lost City of Ubar in Oman. His expeditions to both poles are told in typically modest fashion, but the conditions and the privations Fiennes and his colleagues had to endure make for compelling reading. He really has pushed himself to the limits of human endurance in his quest to succeed. He is open about his failures as well as his successes; the reader cannot help but admire his dogged determination against the odds.

After his expedition to walk solo and unassisted to the North Pole in 2000 he lost a few of his fingertips to frostbite. This forced him to abandon the attempt. His surgeons' advice and Fiennes solution is not for the squeamish! This episode again illustrates the unique personality of the author and his 'Never say never' approach to everything he does.

He suffers a heart attack and has a double heart bypass operation, now most people would have called it a day and accept the limits imposed on them by nature. Not Fiennes, amazingly he and his colleague from a few of his previous expeditions, Dr Mike Stroud attempt seven Marathons on seven Continents in seven days. His descriptions of this amazing feat will thrill and astonish the reader. I had nothing but admiration and respect for someone who continued to push himself when everyone would have understood if he threw in the towel.

The book is not over yet and the final chapters contain his attempts to climb both the Eiger and Everest. Fiennes is a vertigo sufferer, in his sixties and as mentioned earlier has lost the tips to his fingers on one hand! I was riveted as I read his account of these attempts.

This is a thrilling and informative book written by and about a remarkable man. Entertaining and inspiring in equal measure, if you ever wanted to know what it was like to lead a full life then read this!