

Photographer  
in focus  
TOM  
MCNALLY

# Going to extremes

Tom McNally is the co-writer and photographer of the award-winning book *Extreme Lakeland*, which combines his twin loves and professions of photography and adventure sports

Beyond a door in Tom McNally's bedroom in Kettering was a place where miracles happened, a place of mystery and magic under a glow of red light. It is little wonder that his dad's darkroom appealed to the young Tom, who has taken his own pictures for as long as he can remember.

"Dad was a very keen amateur, and he did some paid work so semi-professional really. It was the days of film and I grew up in the darkroom. It felt like witchcraft, seeing these images come through the developer. I was absolutely captivated. It was what I always wanted to do," says Tom.

His dad bought him his first camera, an Olympus OM10, and he took photography at GCSE, A Level and a degree at Northumbria University in Newcastle. It was while in the North East that he got into social documentary photography, focusing on the decline of heavy industry: the closure of an old forge, derelict factories, demolished magnesite works and the famous Byker Wall. "I documented the shift from how terraced houses of shipyard workers were replaced by this utopian vision of what the wall was going to be, and how it didn't really work out," he says.

Tom had always been into outdoor sports and ran the Wildtrak shop in Newcastle and trained in outdoor activity instruction after university. It was a logical extension to combine what he was doing in outdoor sport with photography and, as work came in, eventually the photography took over.

He and his wife Louise, a dentist, met at

university and having a common interest in outdoor adventure moved to Cumbria in 2011. "We got tired of driving back and forth," says Tom. He exhibited at Kendal Mountain Festival in 2011 and produced work for outdoor brands as well as taking trips overseas to places like Iceland documenting sailing, skiing and the landscape.

When the couple's children Ted and Oscar, now three and five, were very small Tom stayed at home to look after them, which gave him time to work on his website and build his business.

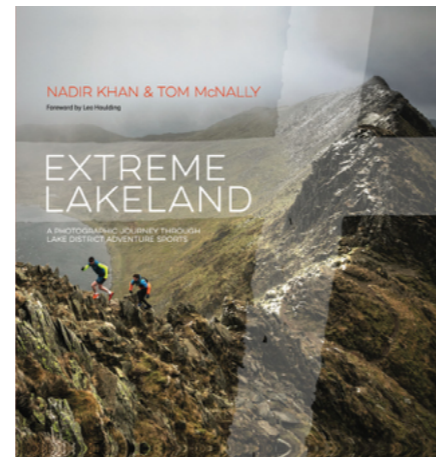
Coincidentally, he approached Nadir Khan, who had released *Extreme Scotland*, at the same time as Nadir contacted him and they teamed up to produce *Extreme Lakeland*. Sir Chris Bonington describes it as: "A true feast for the eyes that perfectly captures why the Lake District is so special for those seeking adventure." It recently won The Eric Robson Striding Edge Productions Prize for Guides & Places at the Lakeland Book of the Year Awards.

Tom, who lives at Penruddock, says: "Being involved in the outdoor scene in the Lake District I know how much goes under the radar, yet people are operating at the cutting edge in rock climbing, base jumping and paragliding. A lot of it goes unreported so for me it's about documenting the people and the outdoor community that exist here."

Consequently he is not one to be put off when the going gets tough, such as climbing in winter with ice axes to get the perfect image that made the front page of the *Sunday Times*, or a single exposure, night-time shot of former Team GB ice skater Esther Newton on

a frozen Scales Tarn, "technically one of the most difficult shots I've ever done", he admits. "But you've got to be in it to win it."

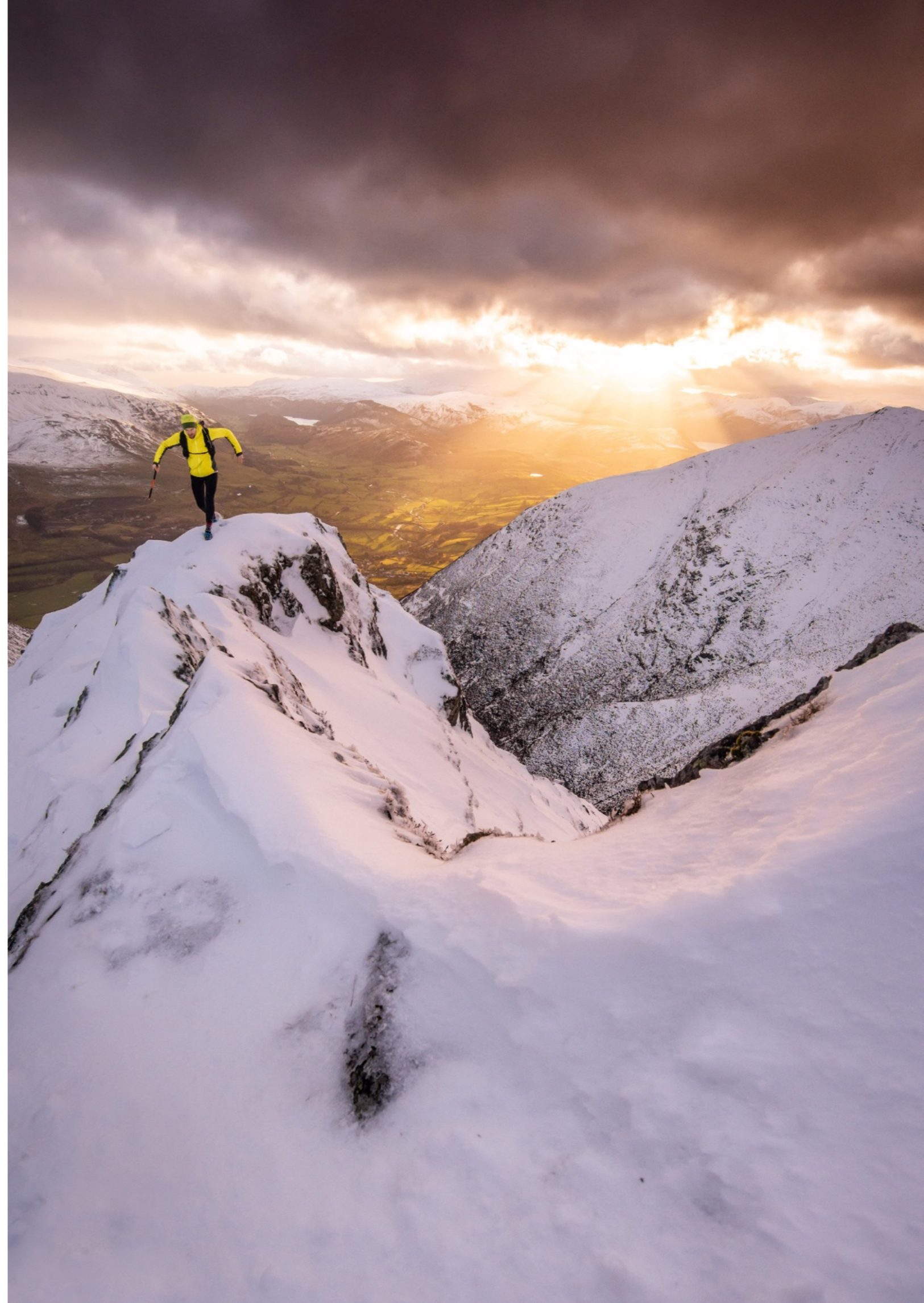
From up high, the next project he is set to reveal takes him down below. His *What Lies Beneath*, the *Lost Mines of the Lake District* exhibition is due to launch at this year's Kendal Mountain Festival along with artists' responses to the legacy of the mining industry.



[tommcnally.co.uk](http://tommcnally.co.uk)

• *Extreme Lakeland: A photographic journey through Lake District adventure sports by Nadir Khan & Tom McNally, published by Vertebrate, is available from [adventurebooks.com](http://adventurebooks.com) and independent bookshops*

• *If you are a Cumbria photographer and would like to be considered for this feature, contact us at [news@cumbrialife.co.uk](mailto:news@cumbrialife.co.uk)*



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