



GQ

BRITISH

GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

JAN/FEB 2020 £3.99

The Rise Of Skywalker

Star Wars

'I felt like I was becoming a ghost'

Daisy Ridley

on scrutiny, self-care and the epic end of the saga

Story by Alex Bhattacharji

Photographed by
Alexi Lubomirski

Jeff Bezos...
and 23 other
people who
should fire
themselves

From
Anguilla to
Zermatt
The 2020
Travel
Special

Battlefield
London
Inside
knife crime's
field hospital

Story by Stuart McGurk

We crown King Timothée!

The annual GQ Best Dressed Men

'George! You can't type
this s**t, but you sure
can't say it!'
- HARRISON FORD





'When guests go back to their world, they appreciate what we've given them here'

How on earth did HIKING get *this* HIP?

Climbing, clean eating and clarity: GQ reaches peak health in the Dolomites

Story by **Bill Prince**

The closing scene of Netflix's three-part documentary *Inside Bill's Brain: Decoding Bill Gates* finds the Microsoft cofounder-turned-weapons-grade philanthropist hiking alone near his home in Medina, Washington, over which the disembodied voice of his late mother, Mary, can be heard saying, "Ultimately, it's not what you get or even what you give; it's what you become."

Unwittingly or not, Mrs Gates was quoting another great walker, Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th-century philosopher-poet who gave up

a humdrum existence in Basel to examine the outer reaches of the human condition on long, solo hikes in the Swiss Alps. It was here that "Fritz" worked up the central theme of his meisterwerk, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: "Become who you are."

For Nietzsche, an enfeebled aesthete with time on his hands, becoming who he was meant walking – and lots of it. According to him, "All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking", an argument picked up in author and academic John Kaag's recent treatise on radical thinking at altitude, *Hiking With Nietzsche: Becoming Who You Are* (Granta Books, £15). And it's a feeling clearly shared by the numerous C-suite executives and boldface names who've visited Californian retreat The Ranch in search of a little self-reliance to go with all that mindfulness.

Named for the hacienda-style Malibu property once owned by *Hopalong Cassidy* star William Boyd, The Ranch is husband-and-wife team Alex and Sue Glasscock's antidote to the fluffy-robed medi-spa, a residential programme of hard exercise and self-restraint that offers a rather more straightforward life hack: a rural idyll with benefits. Each day starts with stretching and a four-hour hike, followed by strength, conditioning and yoga classes and daily massages – a health and wellness regime the founders sum up as "endurance, nutrition, wellness".

"We wanted to be authentic, approachable and to demystify the tenets of health and wellness," says Alex. "It's not about a silver bullet,



The California-based Ranch decamps to the Dolomites for seven off-site weeks in 2020

because that doesn't work; it's about lifestyle. And everyone can hike, even when you're 100. And nature is healing."

Whether it's the environment (technically Chaparral), cuisine (plant-based, but far from basic) or simply the opportunity to drop any societally enforced "stance" for the stipulated seven-day stay (there's also a four-day programme that operates from a nearby Four Seasons in Westlake Village), it's clear The Ranch has tapped into a contemporary need to commune in the great outdoors. "There's something about health that's also about community," says Alex. "Being sequestered with 17 other people you don't really know, in a strange environment: adults don't do that very often. But we've learned that when guests go back into their world, they've appreciated what we've given them here."

The Glasscocks have another outpost planned that will offer a more condensed version of the Malibu regimen. In the meantime, they offer an annual "off-site" in the Italian Alps, where GQ underwent its strenuous yet uniquely rewarding programme.

The walking here is more arduous than that available back in California, but there's far fewer predators to worry about (mountain cat sightings are not uncommon in the Santa Monica mountains) and

navigation is a doddle: local guides hare-leap ahead, marking the trail, which, even in early September, can take you above the snow line.

The Dolomites itinerary differs in another important way: while The Ranch retains much of its backwoods *mien* (Sue calls it "luxury meets boot camp"), here guests stay at the five-star Rosa Alpina, a family-owned hotel in the village of San Cassiano. In addition to the luxe rooms (*inset*) and blissful spa, it also boasts the area's most famous restaurant, the three Michelin-starred St Hubertus. It's a hard spot to leave – particularly when reveille is at 5.30am. Yet aside from a few eventual "outliers", most foreswore the distractions the better to dedicate ourselves to the job at hand: a sequence that can be best summed up as wake, stretch, eat, walk, eat, work out, recuperative massage, eat, sleep, repeat.

The takeaway? Walking is good for you; a plant-based diet helps the gut and serves the planet; mobility is next to godliness the closer you get to heaven's door. "It's all about longevity and doing it well," says Alex. "If you're conscious about staying supple and getting massaged and rigorously exercising so your pipes are all clean, we can live for a really long time and be active." And how becoming is that?

