



There's nothing quite like the freedom of blowing a snot rocket while you are suspended mid-air, flying down your favourite trail. In that amazing place, somewhere between falling and barely controlled movement.

You own your body, how it moves, and how you express it. In the outdoors when nature calls, you simply find a bush, drop your pants, and take a nature wee... or dig a hole if that's what is required!

There are no gendered norms here – you can be decidedly unladylike by societal terms, and it feels so damn good!



*Freedom is being whomever you wish regardless of gendered norms.*

Sometime after childhood the bliss of just being, of living in the moment and exploring, became lost in the shift towards puberty and social influences. Many of us women swapped our scraped knees for hair dyes, and our adventures for manis and pedis. We acquiesced to our pre-determined role in the world, and our womanhood succumbed to a place where the way the body looked took precedence over how it functioned. Fitting into the pressures from society we primped and preened, and while the boys were out getting dirty, we were spending hours in the salon chair getting our highlights done and learning how to use make-up to accentuate our best features.



*Stinky and sweaty with dirt crusted nails and scraped legs – breaking barriers and forging our own paths.*

Back in the mountains, I'm sweating buckets, I seriously stink! Dirt is caked on my legs and there are trails of blood from the spiky bushes that have pressed into my soft flesh as I have forged my way up to the summit. Here, highlights don't count and nicely done nails will soon be caked in dirt. In the mountains, it doesn't matter how the body looks, it just matters how it functions and how it moves. I love this feeling, I live it and this place in the wild, where there are no rules other than Mother Nature's rules. It's a place where gender, male or female, fade away and become insignificant. Where we all have the same basic needs and can achieve the same things.

There is no right or wrong way to be a woman. We are so lucky we live in a time where we are able to forge our own paths. That being said, there are still barriers for many women to take up their rightful place in the outdoors. To feel safe, confident and able, and to enjoy all the benefits, both mental and physical, that come from moving our bodies in nature. We need to throw away the rulebook for how women *should* be, and embrace our own inner power.



*What began with a 30km marathon, quickly turned into trail running, then ultramarathon, mountain biking, rock climbing, and now Tanya is embarking on mountaineering.*

## Learn the skills you need to feel confident

The biggest barrier I see when it comes to women getting into the outdoors is the fear of the unknown. To be self-empowered we first need to know that we are capable of achieving our goals, and we need to acquire the skills necessary to confidently go forward and do things we want to do. These days there are a million YouTube videos and websites offering tutorials where you can learn skills. These are valuable resources, however, participating in a real-life



class or joining a group is even better! It might feel daunting to put yourself out there at first, but the new friendships and community you can build will continue to support and strengthen that new skill.

Check [Facebook](#), your local sports groups, or google the heck out of it and I guarantee you'll find the group you need to upskill. Upskilling is seriously the numero uno for being self-empowered in the outdoors. You'll feel like the biggest badass when you've nailed your double fisherman's knot, or honed your navigation skills to a point where you can scale a mountain all by yourself. The difference between an empowered woman and an un-empowered woman is simply education. Armed with knowledge and skills you will be a formidable force.



*Seek out empowered women who have forged their own path and use their knowledge and stories to inspire your own.*

## Find role models

To be self-empowered you need to consciously take control of your life. To do that, it helps to have direction. There are many badass women that have gone before us to show what is possible, and these are the women to seek out for inspiration. Read their books, follow their journeys, and bask in their bravery and audacity until a little has rubbed off on you. When we can look upon the women who have gone before and see our similarities, we can then feel more comfortable chasing our dreams and goals.



*Hiking up Breast Hill, Lake Hawea with the girls.*

## Find your adventure buddies

It's a well-known and often touted mantra of self-help books: *surround yourself with the type of people you want to be like*. Maybe I'm pulling out the old clichés, but clichés are just that for a reason, huh?!

When it comes to self-empowerment in the outdoors, you'll bust through those fears faster and have more fun doing it with friends! You can bounce ideas, practice taking turns leading, go to training together – not to mention have someone to take epic photos of your renegade self! If empowerment comes from confidence, and there is confidence in numbers, then this one is a no-brainer.



*Mountaineering with the girls.*

## Remember, it is a process

Personal development, learning new skills, becoming the rebel woman who breaks the mould and defies the stereotype... I wish it could all happen overnight, but unfortunately, these things take time and the process is part of the journey.

Actually, if you take away just one thing from these words let it be this:



*The goal, the dream... it is only ever a process.*

Or let me put it another way, using another cliché... *It is the journey, not the destination.* Self-empowerment and your outdoor journey will grow with you all your life! You will learn a new skill, and overcome one hurdle, only to be presented with the next. The beauty comes in the day-to-day small wins. So celebrate those. Because, in the end, it will be the succession of small wins that sculpt you into who you want to be.



*Step outside the mould and become who you wish to be.*

It really is an exciting time to be a woman. We have more freedom than at any previous point in history, yet we are still navigating a maelstrom of expectations – both of our own making, and from society. I implore you to step outside the mould if you feel that's where you wish to be. Harness your personal agency, then foster an external environment that enables you to take purposeful action, and therein exercise your self-empowerment.

Whether you choose to do it in a ladylike fashion with toilet paper, or go full wild-woman with the pee and shake – do it your way, do it with pride, and own your life. Now is the time!

**Are you an empowered wild woman?**