



Expect the unexpected.

Cage fighting, meatheads and strippers, naked swimming, making cheese with Charles Martell and now a book on extreme fishing with Robson Green - it's an action-packed life for Charlotte Reather, the girl from Cheltenham Ladies' College

This is awkward. I'm interviewing Charlotte Reather because she's talented, funny and excellent company; but ostensibly because she's just ghost-written (in a prominent sort of way) Robson Green's *Extreme Fishing* book, currently angling for pole position in the hardback bestseller lists.

The problem is, I've got a conflict of interests. One of my friends is Jeremy Wade of Channel 4's *River Monsters*. (Though let's be clear: I knew him first as a Minchinhampton neighbour, long before he got famous and started wrestling piranhas on TV.)

Obviously, this situation requires a degree of diplomacy and maturity. There's only one way to settle it.

"So who would win in a fight?" I ask Charlotte. "Robson or Jeremy?"

It's not an easy one and she thinks hard for a moment. "Umm..." she muses. "Jeremy is the expert, whereas Robson is kind of out of his comfort zone. I don't know. Maybe Robson would win in a slapping match, but: 'Not the face! Not the face! I'm an actor, you know!'"

Charlotte is definitely The Girl to write Robson's book. A columnist for hunting-shooting-fishing magazine *The Field* for a good few years (her piece on wild swimming - complete with a tastefully undraped Charlotte - did wonders for sales. More on that later), she was brought up in deepest countryside around Cirencester, went to Cheltenham Ladies' College and is unassailably Posh. But, being Charlotte, of course, she didn't get the ghost-writing job

through any conventional channels.

"I met Robson at a cage fight," she explains, naturally. "Some friends had dragged me along; I went in full evening wear, whereas my friends were in jeans. But at £80 ticket, I'd expected a ball."

At this point, I should write, "To cut a long story short." But I can't deprive you of Charlotte's unparalleled Brideshead descriptions, all delivered in her cut-glass accent. "So I was completely wrongly attired as was, luckily, a friend of mine, who wore a purple smoking jacket. And we were there with all these meatheads and strippers, who were glow-in-the-dark orange and had enormous pneumatic

6 Life - certainly in Charlotte's world - has a habit of taking turns you never asked for

boobs. There was an Indian wedding going on next door and the men, who kept slipping out to have their pictures taken with these Spearmint Rhino strippers, were constantly being marched back in by mothers, wives and other irate Asian women.

"It was awesome. When they were fighting, the chant was, 'Switch him off! Switch him off!' which I got thoroughly into."

To cut a long story short (now), a friend spotted actor, singer and passionate fisherman Robson across the room, and dared Charlotte to ask him for an interview

for *The Field*. "So we planned that I would go up - a bit of alcohol was involved - and say [deep Northumberland accent], 'Show me your rod and I'll show you my scamp!', which we thought was really funny.

"We went up and my friend, Emma, was like, 'Say it! Say it!' But I absolutely bottled it and said, 'Oh, hello Robson. My name is Charlotte; I write for *The Field*; I wondered if I could possibly interview you, please'."

Despite inauspicious beginnings, Robson did the interview, loved it, and immediately thought of Charlotte when he was approached to write the book to accompany his highly-successful Channel 5 series, in which he travels the world catching shark, octopus and generally making cod-awful puns.

The result is an entertaining angling romp, full of fishing tips and laugh-out-loud anecdotes. Is she an angler herself? "I catch fish on casts that don't deserve fish and hook people's wellies. But Robson really liked the fact that I understood the countryside and his soul as a countryman. Equally, I made him look erudite and funny - so I basically didn't use any of his quotes."

She is joking. (I think.) I also think she's joking when she tells me that writing the book gave her heart palpitations. But it turns out she's taken her heart monitor off for the interview and photographs. "I can't believe this bloody fishing book has given me a heart condition," she says. "I wrote it in nine weeks - 90,000 words - so it's hopefully just stress. I've done lots of other crazy stuff recently - I broke my collarbone about a year ago in a riding accident; I got married; I cycled from London to Paris; and then we moved to Washington DC."

Cycled? "Ed, my husband, volunteered me for a British Legion ride to Paris. The most I'd ever cycled before was about 20 miles and I had to do over 300. During the training, I was organising the wedding, I'm going to get him back: I'm going to get him on Ironman [a series of long distance triathlon races]."

Fantastic. Good luck with the marriage, then.

The last time I interviewed Charlotte was 10 years ago, when her career was taking off as a stand-up comedian, comedy scriptwriter (Cheltenham man, Maurice Gran of *Birds of a Feather* fame, had taken her under his wing) and TV presenter. But life – certainly in Charlotte's world – has a habit of taking turns you never asked for. (In fact, as one of nine women panellists invited to speak back at the Ladies' College recently, she took the subject 'unexpected career directions'.) "I got a screenplay optioned and had about four commissions for sitcoms; but, weirdly, the kind of journalism that was a side-line took off. As I told the girls, I've always taken every opportunity, seized life with both hands and given it a good old tussle."

It was after her infamous wild swimming piece in *The Field*, for which she agreed to dive into Spring Lake at the Cotswold Water Park naked ("I was up to my ankles in duck poo. It was extraordinarily unglamorous but the editor said he'd up my fee and I thought: You only live once") that she received an unusual fan letter. "Up until then, I'd had this elderly following, plus a few people in prison who used to send me fan letters. Then, one day, a bluey – as it's called – turned up from Afghanistan." It was from a Royal Marine, who'd read her column and liked what he saw.

Which was? Apart from the naked photo? "Mine was a fairly outrageous column. If you can get dogging and bleaching into *The Field*, I think you're doing quite well."

Point taken.

The Marine in question was a Taunton chap called Ed Moorhouse, a company commander, at that time out in Afghanistan. The two became penfriends, met up when Ed came home on R&R in August 2011 and married in August 2012. They're now midway through a posting to Washington DC, where Ed is working in defence policy at the Embassy – though they have a cottage in Cirencester, which is still home. And Charlotte is keeping her hand in by continuing to write a Charlie's Challenges column for *NFU Countryside*.

"I do a different challenge each month but, because I'm living abroad, I'm doing them in bulk. I've been staining glass at Ruskin Mill in Nailsworth and making



“I’ve always taken every opportunity, seized life with both hands and given it a good old tussle”

cheese with Charles Martell. I've blade-sheared sheep and done vintage tractor restoration. I absolutely love it.

"We're currently living in suburbia but we get out into the Virginian countryside a lot and, bizarrely, we've found a place called Middleburg, where everyone reads *The Field*. They're all anglophiles; there are five packs of hounds and I've even played polo out there.

"I took some friends of mine from Gloucestershire and some locals asked where they were from. When they replied, 'Tetbury', they said, 'Do you know the antique shop Top Banana?' Apparently, the antique shops in Middleburg come over and buy all their stock from there."

So is there any point in asking what Charlotte will do next?

"No," she says, firmly. "I've given up predicting. I've got different projects on the horizon but I'll definitely work with Robson again. I'd like to do some scripted work with him and we're talking about that at the moment. But," she shrugs, "who knows? I never expected to write a book on fishing. And I now know more about fishing than I'll probably ever need to know." ■

Robson Green's Extreme Fishing (with Charlotte Reather) is published by Simon and Schuster, price £16.99. For more on Charlotte, visit charlottereahter.com