

[Earthquake Booming]

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: It took tens of millions of years for plate tectonics to build the Rocky Mountains. It took millions more for glaciers, wind, and river to carve the amazing topography that we see today. And in 2016, it took 100 miles of that terrain plus 19 hours to make runner Clare Gallagher an overnight sensation in the world of ultramarathons. And a big voice in environmental activism. My name is Catherine Riihimaki, and I'm here today with Clare Gallagher. Clare, thank you for joining me on All for Earth.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Thanks so much for having me, Catherine.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: First of all, what was that race in 2016, and why in the world did you do it?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: That race is the Leadville 100, which is a 100-mile trail race near this tiny old mining town called Leadville, and I'm still kind of unsure why I did it. [Laughter] It was, it was a pretty naive thing to do. I had only started doing ultramarathons, just dabbling in the previous year leading up to Leadville, and basically I moved back from Asia where I had been teaching English via the Teaching Fellowship program, Princeton in Asia. And I moved to Boulder, Colorado, and I got in with this group of trail runners, and everyone was doing 100-milers. And I was like, "Oh, I guess that's what I'll do, too." So I signed up for my first one and that happened to be Leadville.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: That is totally my impression of Boulder, Colorado is that everyone who's there is some extreme athlete.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, it's kind of sick.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: So it seems important to note that, you know, you're not doing road running, so you're doing trail running, like you said. And so that seems to bring you into contact with the environment in kind of a unique way. Can you talk a little bit about how the environment impacts your experience as an ultra runner?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, it's so incredible to spend time, a lot of time, in, in mountain terrain. Most, usually my races are in mountainous terrain, so in Leadville, in particular, it's, the entire race happens above almost 10,000 feet, and it gets up to almost 13,000 feet. So you're in true alpine terrain. It's like granite boulders covered in lichen, you know, like psychedelic green lichen that like crust. And there's wild flowers that are, that are just so delicate. You know, it's dusty, it's hot. You can't breathe, at least in the summer. And yeah, I spend a lot of time around the world in these types of environments, you know. They're different based on the place, and I feel innately connected. When I go a few days without a long run outside, I start to get jittery, and you know, I just want my feet to be touching the ground, and to have silence, and to hear the elements. Yeah, it's pretty much what I live for.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: So Clare, you do a lot of environmental activism, but what, what does that actually look like? I mean, you have a website with a blog. You have social media accounts. What does that look like for you?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: A lot of my activism happens on social media because that's where people follow me, follow my running. So I use it as an opportunity to educate my followers on what's happening. Whether it's in Colorado, like with a climate bill coming up or, or broadly and I'll write specific captions. I'll give links to petitions. I will write representatives' phone numbers down, so that's via social media. And then in person, I give a lot of talks to explain why it matters to care about the environment if you like to run, or if you like to be outside. And then I've done actual lobbying in both Colorado and D.C., like climate change lobbying. Which that sounds almost--.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: It's a negative word.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, yeah, and, but it's kind of crazy when you're just asking your representative and senators, "Hey, can you do something about climate change, please?"

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Right, and you've done that.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: That's basically what it is.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: You've done that one on one, but you've also testified, right?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Correct, yeah. I've lobbied in D.C. one on one with this amazing organization called Protect Our Winters, and then I've testified in the Colorado State Legislature on a climate bill, yeah.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: And then you supplement all of that with longer form writing on your blog, so you know, details of what air quality, poor air quality is, down to the science of what particulate matter is, and ozone. And it seems like you're hitting lots of different areas of activism and outreach.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, I try to do as much as possible, but it's interesting because I'm not a traditional activist or organizer in the way, you know, someone for Greenpeace is. And so I try to make it relevant to my community, and my community is a bunch of runners. So that's why hitting the messages with various forms is important, and ultimately getting people together to run. So there's this incredible event called Running Up For Air, which was created by this genius trail runner in Salt Lake City, Jared Campbell, which gets people doing laps of a mountain while the air pollution is really bad. So in Salt Lake City, the inversion is awful in the winter because cold air gets trapped underneath warm air, and the pollution from cars and industrial power plants and trucks gets stuck,

and you literally run up through the inversion. And this event is kind of masochistic because you're running for like six, 12, or 24 hours. And so it's just genius because it got a lot of media attention, so then you have news outlets saying, you know, "Why are these runners running up Grandeur Peak? Oh! Because the air pollution is so bad in Salt Lake City, and we should do something about it." And that event last year raised \$40,000 for a nonprofit called Breathe Utah.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: And you guys actually, I saw some of the photos from that. You ran for part of it with face masks on, right?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, well actually this year the inversion wasn't that bad, but in past years, they've had to wear face masks, exactly.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: So speaking of races, I mean, the Leadville 100 is not the only ultramarathon you've won. And this summer, you just had a huge win of the Western States 100 in the Sierra Nevada in 17 hours and 23 minutes. So big congratulations for that. That's a huge win for you!

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Thank you!

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: You're welcome. When, when did you realize that your athletic success might give you a platform to address environmental issues on kind of a bigger stage?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: It was almost exactly when I decided. After Leadville, it was in 2016. I had quit my job as an emergency room scribe, because I thought, I thought I might apply to med school, and it just was not checking out. So and then I won Leadville, and I decided, "Oh, okay I can try and do this--quote, 'full time'." It basically is a lot of dirt-bagging when you're in a niche endurance sport that doesn't have big paychecks. So I landed a few sponsorships, and that fall though, you know, the 2016 elections happened. And it was at that time where I felt, "Oh, if I have the privilege and opportunity to be a full-time runner, and this just happened to America," you know the election of Trump, I thought, "I need to take my job really seriously," and the fact that I'm seeing public lands constantly and seeing climate change first hand. And traveling around the world and talking to various people about their opinions on climate change and things, I thought, "I need to make this as much part of my job as running is." So it kind of was like, if I'm going to be a full-time runner, I need to be more than just that, so.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Well, and you have a --.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, it's been like that ever since.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: You're sponsored by Patagonia, among others, and they don't just tolerate your environmental activism, they actually encourage it, right? And so you just returned from a trip to Alaska that they sponsored. Can you talk a little bit about that?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, this, Patagonia has completely blown open my mind to what it means to be, you know, an ambassador, an athletic ambassador, as they call us. You know, we need to be more than that, and thus, I get a call in early June from not only Tommy Caldwell, one of the world's greatest climbers of all time.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: He was one of the--he was one of the climbers in The Dawn Wall and has a cameo in Free Solo.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yes, exactly. And he goes, and he's a Patagonia ambassador, and he and I actually both have roles as global sports activists now. So that adds to it where Patagonia's encouraging, you know, they basically, it's like our job to be more activist. But anyways, he calls and says, "Hey, there's an opportunity to go to a climate change summit in Fort Yukon, Alaska," which is in the Arctic Circle, and the Gwich'in people live there, a tribe that's been living there for millennia. And he was like, "And then we're going to do an expedition in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Do you want to come?" [Laughter] And I was like, "Oh, yeah, sure! When?" You know, thinking it would be like in a year, and he goes, "Oh, it's in ten days." [Laughter] And I didn't even tell him that I had this huge race coming up, Western States, and I thought about it for an hour. And the--it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go and learn from, and it was. The Gwich'in people are, and everyone in the Arctic right now, at all latitudes or at all across the globe in the Arctic latitudes are experiencing such severe climate change impacts as the Arctic warms twice as fast as the rest of the world. And so we just learned firsthand how these hunters, people who live and almost entirely off the land. Eighty percent of their diet is from hunting and fishing, and they're dealing with food scarcity as populations change. You know, moose, caribou, salmon, geese. They can't hunt and fish with the same reliability as they could in the past. So that was just completely mind, mind-blowing, really. And then we went and did a really big expedition in the Refuge. [Laughter] And I'm laughing just because I'm so happy I came out alive. [Laughter] We climbed the second-highest peak in the Brooks Range, and packrafted for a few days. And you know there's 24 hours of sunlight, and we saw thousands of caribou in this area of the Refuge called the "10-02 area." That's what the oil companies call it, where there could be potential drilling as early as this fall if a bill in the House of Representatives doesn't pass this summer to stop it. So it was just a mind-blowing trip to see what's at stake.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: And you guys were there in part to raise awareness, longer term, for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in the Gwich'in community, but also really targeted at this House bill. Is that right?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: One hundred percent, yeah. And this fight to protect the Arctic has been going on, and Gwich'in people, because Gwich'in are intrinsically linked to the porcupine caribou herd. That's the majority of their food source. And the porcupine caribou herd thrive and give birth to their babies in the Refuge. So if the Refuge were to be drilled, the Gwich'in would be inevitably, greatly impacted in terms of food security. So and there's been efforts to make the Refuge a wilderness area for basically the past three decades, or even longer. And Patagonia's been a part of this since the nineties. If you look back at their catalogs, you can see that they've been trying to get more people talking about the Refuge, and sending letters to representatives and senators to make it a wilderness area. And this is, this is honestly the absolute most important time in this juncture

because of how threatening the Trump Administration has made this new oil leasing. It's the closest it's ever been from truly wrecking this place.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Yeah. Maybe you can talk a little bit more about what your experience was when you were there, knowing that your race was coming up, but also knowing that you have this amazing opportunity to interact with people who are even more on the frontlines of what's happening in the world. Sort of how you balance that. I mean, is it something that weighed on you that you were potentially, you know, sacrificing your normal pre-race training for this opportunity?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, 100%. It is a very weird mental place to be in, but once I got up to Alaska to Fort Yukon at this climate summit, and then in the Refuge with Tommy, another Patagonia ambassador, Luke Nelson, and a photographer, Austin Siadak. Everything just melted away, like it didn't matter in a way. I thought, "If I don't run Western States this year, it truly doesn't matter." To be in such a wild place was, was life-changing, and to hear people like Tommy, Luke, and Austin say it's the most wild place they've ever been, and they've been everywhere! Like I feel like I've been to a lot of mountains; they've been to truly a lot of mountains! And to see a place that has no signs of humans. There are no trails there. There's no, there's no landmarks. There's nothing that, that humans have left, and it was so wild. And it was honestly really difficult terrain to move in. We had heavy packs, like 50-pound pack, and I was following the best mountain athletes in the world. I remember one, one day we were approaching this mountain, which is almost 9000 feet, Mt. Hooper. And but and you start really low, so it's a lot of relief. You have to gain like 6000 feet over the course of, we did it in basically a day. We were in this drainage, and it was just the loosest rock and scree you could possibly imagine. There's no trail, and I'm just trying to keep my balance with this heavy pack on these loose rocks. Trying to keep up, and then you know, I'm thinking of my mom. I'm like, "Oh, I really just don't want to die!" And it was in those moments though that I realized this is, this is worth it to be in a place that is pushing me to my limits, to see a place that really should be left alone. And as Luke said, he goes, "Clare, this is gratitude training." And I'm like, "What do you mean? Like, I'm not feeling like grateful right now." Because at the time, I was like pretty stressed out. I didn't want to sprain an ankle. And he goes, "Well, when you get to the Western States trail, you know, in ten days, you're going to be really grateful for that trail." [Laughter] Yeah, so it was a lesson in gratitude training for how, how wonderful it is to have, you know, a beautiful buttery single-track trail. But also how precious it is to have a place that doesn't have those human impacts.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: One of the things that fascinates me about your activism is that you do such a wonderful job of merging the really big picture, you know. These are wild places, beautiful places. But then being very directed about, you know, this bill, House Bill 1156, and these candidates, and you know, this particular issue, you know, going into what are the definitions of poor air quality? And you know why is it important for you in your activism to get to that level of specificity instead of sort of the really arm-wavy, "Can't we just save the earth, everyone?"

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Right. That's kind of you, and I think the level of corruption and attacks on our environment, our air, pretty much everything we need as humans and as Americans. They're so strategic and pointed, and if you really read into what's happening from Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, all the way down, and those attacks are very pointed. And in order to combat such blatant attacks on our rights as humans and Americans to breathe clean air, to be in a natural space, we have to play the game, right? And that requires engaging in democracy, and

that's the whole point of having this amazing thing called a democracy in America. And basically I had to give myself a crash course--really it was in 2016 when I, you know, these, these assaults on our environment started happening basically when we, when Trump pulled us out of the Paris Climate Agreement. And I thought, "Wait. How is this possible? You know, why isn't my senator doing something about this? Why aren't my representative--?" The fact that I didn't really even know how bills and engaging with our representatives work until I Googled it. Shows, showed me that I, I want to educate, you know, people who follow me for running. I feel it's my duty to use my platform to, to actually tell them something useful, not just platitudes about, about beauty and mountains, you know?

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: And does that help you kind of get beyond just preaching to the choir? Because I would imagine that the ultrarunning community is already pretty environmentally aware. But that doesn't mean everyone is focused in a uniform action that can actually make a difference.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Correct, yeah. I think giving direct actions and explaining specific bills. You know, whether it's for climate, policy, or something like protecting the Arctic refuge is really important. To give concrete things for people to at least a starting point, to sink their teeth into, and so if you, if you broadly care about the environment, that's great. But what does that actually mean? What are you doing? What are you reading? What are you Googling, and I've found, yeah, the more specific I get, especially with addressing like representative in Colorado who don't vote for the environment, or for climate. Like I have no problem tagging them in my social media and calling them out because ultimately they're representing us. It's their job! And yes, that has expanded my audience to beyond an echo chamber.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: And you also, I mean, you went to Washington, D.C. and met with both senators. Or I shouldn't say you met with both senators. You met with one senator and the other senator's staff, right? You were underwhelmed by that.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, you know, Colorado has two senators right now. Senator Michael Bennet, who met with this climate org I was with called Protect Our Winters. He was absolutely wonderful and gracious with his time, and has voted for the environment time and time again. And then Senator Cory Gardner sent us a super-young staff member, who didn't really listen, and it's just crazy because Colorado's recreation economy is ginormous. It's so huge that it gets like \$29 billion dollars it rakes in every year. And for a senator to not meet with the CMO, Chief Marketing Officer of Aspen ski resorts about climate change and snowpack? Like what are you doing, dude? Who are you meeting with? Like, you know, Colorado's economy runs on skiing in the winter and snowboarding, or these mountain town completely rely on it. And so, and it goes the same with Representative on the Western Slopes, Scott Tipton has yet to ever meet with these ski resort executives and things who are really concerned about thousands of people they employ as snowpack decreases due to climate change.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: It seems like, you know, you are so passionate about these issues that you would probably pursue them even if Patagonia weren't your sponsor? Maybe you can talk a little bit about what sponsorship really means, and what role Patagonia plays in your activism? And really what the role is for sponsors in any professional athlete's, you know, public life, and what they, what they do with their platform?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, it's a tricky realm, and I definitely, I wouldn't have a sponsor if they cared about what I was saying. That's why I'm so, so grateful to be so aligned with Patagonia. I'm honestly motivated to do more because of how much they're doing. To see a big, big brand, big company going above and beyond to track their supply chains and carbon footprint. They're going to be carbon neutral across all realms of their supply chain by 2025. So that includes factories, you know, in Asia. I have to tell this, this story. Patagonia basically has gone into this analysis of every single thing that has a carbon footprint that they do. And they found that a factory in Japan that weaves the puffy jackets that are so popular, right? They're called Micro Puffs, and it's a huge, huge item that they sell a lot of. The factory uses a ton of energy in the sewing machines to create these jackets because the weave is very specific, and it takes really slow, slow sewing. So the sewing machines are consuming a ton of energy, and Patagonia goes, "Oh, my gosh. If we could get this factory to run on renewable energy, it would reduce our overall carbon footprint by something like ten percent." Like that's how much energy this, this factory uses. And they go to this factory in Japan, offer all of this portfolio of options of going to solar, because it's a really sunny area. And the factory goes, "Sure!" [Laughter]

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Why wouldn't they?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, they were like, "Okay, makes sense to us." So, you know, that's in the process of happening right now, and the beautiful part of that is that factory doesn't just make Patagonia items. It makes a ton of other big brands in the industry, you know? And so those brands are benefiting by the effort of Patagonia. And if every big brand was going through that effort, the outdoor apparel industry would actually be moving the needle, especially in the fashion and clothing industries, which is a pretty noxious impact environmentally. So it's just an example. If everyone was doing their due diligence, the world would be a better place.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Do you think athletes have the ability to move their sponsors? Because you've talked about sort of Patagonia giving you opportunities, but you know is that something, and Patagonia giving the entire sporting industry, outdoor sporting industry a push. But, you know, what role do the athletes play in that?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: I think it's unfortunate. Athletes, you know, my friends, these people I've just become a community with over the last few years, have a lot less say than you would think. And these big corporations that are publicly traded really care about their bottom lines. So, you know, it's expensive to do the right thing sometimes, and to make your entire line of recycled polyester instead of just one item or one shirt that you use in an ad campaign. "Oh, we make sure it's out of recycled bottles." That's great, but what percentage of your entire lines is made from recycled polyester? That's the question consumers should be asking, because brands are really, really skilled at greenwashing through marketing campaigns.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Right. So I'm curious what you're moving onto next. Are there specific issues that are on the table for you? I mean, obviously the, it's not like you're done with the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. And what's next for you as a runner?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: I'll be continuing to focus on climate policy at a Colorado level, and also national when I get the opportunities. But specifically, I think so much action comes locally, and I'm really focused on a wilderness bill right now for Colorado that would protect over 400,000 acres across the state, and we really need one of our senators, Senator Cory Gardner, to speak up just to have an opinion on it. So thus, that pushes me to really care about 2020 elections. It's going to be a huge focus of mine.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: And he's up for re-election in 2020?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Correct, yeah. And it's just enough is enough. Like if you claim to care about public lands and clean air, you need to actually vote for those things. Running wise, I'll continue to race and do what inspires me. It's important to not over-race, so I'm not exactly sure what I'm going to race next, but it'll be--.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: What's the schedule? Is it like a, one 100-mile race a year? Or is it one a season? Or, you know, what's the typical load for you?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: It's, I, I think one a year is plenty. Other people are crazy and do five a year. But at this point in my career and life, I don't think I'll do another hundred this year. But I'll definitely do other races. I love 50Ks and 50-milers. So we'll see what [inaudible].

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: You fill your spare time with trying to set fastest known times in beautiful places, too?

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Yeah, I really started to love the, the process of an FKT or fastest known time. Exploring national parks via a really hard effort is kind of like the ultimate day for me because it, it motivates me and encourages me to do research about a place I wouldn't normally know about. And then, and then to have like a race effort with friends as crew or what not, is so special, so we'll see what's in line. I need to do some things around Colorado for sure this summer.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Excellent. Well, Clare, thank you so much for joining me. This is so inspirational. I definitely need to get my running shoes on, but also my activist shoes on. So thank you for hitting both, both areas. This was a real pleasure.

>> CLARE GALLAGHER: Thank you so much for having me, Catherine!

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Clare Gallagher is a professional ultramarathoner and environmentalist. You can read about her exploits and her advocacy at her website Clare.run. That's C-l-a-r-e dot run. You can find links to her writing and her social media accounts there. Please subscribe to our podcast

feed wherever you get your podcasts. I also hope to see you all in person October 24 and 25 at Princeton University for a celebration of 25 years of The Princeton Environmental Institute. Several of our podcast guests will be speaking at the forum, and there will be many more exceptional minds in all aspects of the environment and sustainability. Until then, be well.

>> All for Earth is a production of The Princeton Environmental Institute and the Princeton University Office of Communications, in collaboration with Princeton's Council on Science and Technology and assistance from the Office of Instructional Support Services and the Office of Information Technology. Our Executive Producer is Margaret Koval, and our Audio Engineer and Editor is Daniel Kearns. The opinions expressed here represent the views of the individuals involved and not those of the university. Princeton podcasts are available on all major distribution channels, including Spotify and the Apple and the Google Podcast apps.