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Mail-Interview with Jeremy Moon, Founder and CEO of Icebreaker, New Zealand

1. In Germany, we had a really long winter and after that a long rainy period. Finally, we got a nice summer with a lot of sun. What's the weather like in New Zealand, right now?

It's winter here in New Zealand, which means we get a mixture of rain, snow and sun with colder temperatures. A few weeks ago I was skiing with my kids in the South Island of New Zealand between Queenstown and Wanaka. It was fantastic being in the mountains and sharing such a special time with my three crazy daughters. Thankfully, they are much better skiers than I was at their age. The great thing about skiing in the South Island is that you're surrounded by vast merino stations.

I always get a chill down my spine when I'm driving up to the mountains because it just brings our Born / Worn story alive, and reinforces the deep truth in what we do. I enjoy explaining it over and over to my kids – they pretend to get never tire of it.

There is such an elegant simplicity through taking a fiber created by nature to keep an animal alive in the mountains and transforming it into a system of layers to keep humans alive in the mountains. It's a deep natural cycle that is true and discovered. It was that inspiration that started Icebreaker, and I love that after 18 years it still holds true.

2. Years back, my grandmother knitted woolen underwear for the kids. Those itched a lot, and therefore we didn't like to wear it. What kind of clothing did you wear in your childhood?

I too wore those itchy scratchy woollen jumpers hence why when I discovered merino it seemed so right.

3. At the age of 24, you started your own company. How hard was it to convince the investors or banks to spend money for the production of merino outdoor clothing?

I was young, so it was hard. In fact, I took out a loan of NZ\$20,000 to build a kitchen that I ended up using in the business. I then managed to persuade eight investors to put in money - some of them were parents of my friends – they each put in NZ\$25,000 (one of them, Noel Todd is still on the Icebreaker board today).

It took three years for us to make its first profit – of NZ\$800. Noel Todd always jokes that it is the first company he’s been involved in where you could drink the profits and still remain sober.

4. Wool helps against freezing in wintertimes. But how does the material work, when people have to deal with sweating in the summer?

In warm weather, Icebreaker merino keeps your skin cool by transporting moisture vapour away from the skin to be evaporated. And because Icebreaker merino breathes beautifully, moisture vapour escapes without making you feel clammy.

5. Do you recommend merino outdoor clothing for all kinds of sport? Or are there any activities that rather ask for synthetics than for merino?

I would absolutely recommend merino outdoor clothing for all sports. The only time when you might need to wear synthetics is if you need something that is skintight which is probably only relevant if you’re a professional athlete looking to go faster.

Our technical sports range is ideal for sport and fitness because the premium merino regulates temperature, is highly breathable to prevent clamminess and overheating, dries fast and resists odor – so one outfit can be worn for multiple workouts without washing.

6. What has to be done with the wool so that the clothing doesn’t itch anymore?

We use soft, fine merino, from the Southern Alps of New Zealand. It’s made from keratin – the protein in your hair, skin and nails – so it’s as comfortable to wear as your own skin.

Traditional wool, the old itchy stuff, is from lowland sheep which have thicker, coarser fibers that prickle or itch when pushed into the skin.

The merino fibers are so fine that they simply bend when they come into contact with your skin.

7. What kind of feedback about the Baacode do you get from your customers?

Our customers, including German, tell us how much they appreciate being able to meet merino growers at high country New Zealand sheep stations, see how the workers who made their garments are treated, and learn about clean manufacturing technologies. Baacode is a way for us to demonstrate our commitment to environmental and social ethics. We're able to tell the story of our garments all the way through the supply chain.

8. What do you think about the market for merino outdoor clothing in Europe and especially in Germany?

The market for merino outdoor clothing in Europe and especially Germany is growing as people learn about and appreciate the performance benefits of merino wool, a natural fiber. Germans appreciate that it's not only about a renewable natural fiber as the raw material – it's about everything that happens to that fiber as it is being transformed into a garment.

While these decisions result in us incurring a manufacturing cost premium over many of our competitors we believe they authenticate the value, Germans in particular, attribute to our brand and the quality of the garments they wear.

We are proud to be the pioneers of the merino-clothing category.

9. What are your plans for the next decade?

We're not perfect and we are constantly looking for new innovations and improvements while meeting the needs of our customers. Basically we want to do a better job of what we started.