

TRAVEL

IF GETTING beasted by drill sergeant sounds like your idea of fun, then you'll already be familiar with bootcamp fitness sessions.

The military-style exercise routines are enjoying a massive surge in popularity as more and more Brits turn to army challenges to beat the bulge.

But lobbing tractor tyres around your local park with one eye on the passing ice cream truck is all well and good – what happens when you take it to the EXTREME?

We sent our willing scribe RACHEL SPENCER TO Xtreme Bootcamp in posh Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, where she was put through her paces by ex-forces hard-cases.

And here Rachel – who's more comfortable with a glass of bubbly than a kettlebell – lifts the lid on her gruelling experience.

Boot camp was muddy brilliant!

ROPED IN: I had to tackle my fear of heights



"WHEN I hobbled into Sport Towers with bruises on my elbows and knees, my colleagues thought I'd been having a right good time.

Sadly, my war wounds weren't from steamy romps. Instead, I'd been crawling over rocks, chucking myself over walls and flying face first down mud slides at Xtreme Bootcamp, run by Royal Marine Reservist James Evans, 22.

The two-day programme has been developed with his specialist knowledge in training and fitness to challenge anyone to the ultimate test of toughness – smashing a whopping 6,000 calories in the process.

And, as luck would have it, I tested it out on a weekend that just happened to be the wettest of the year.

Cushy

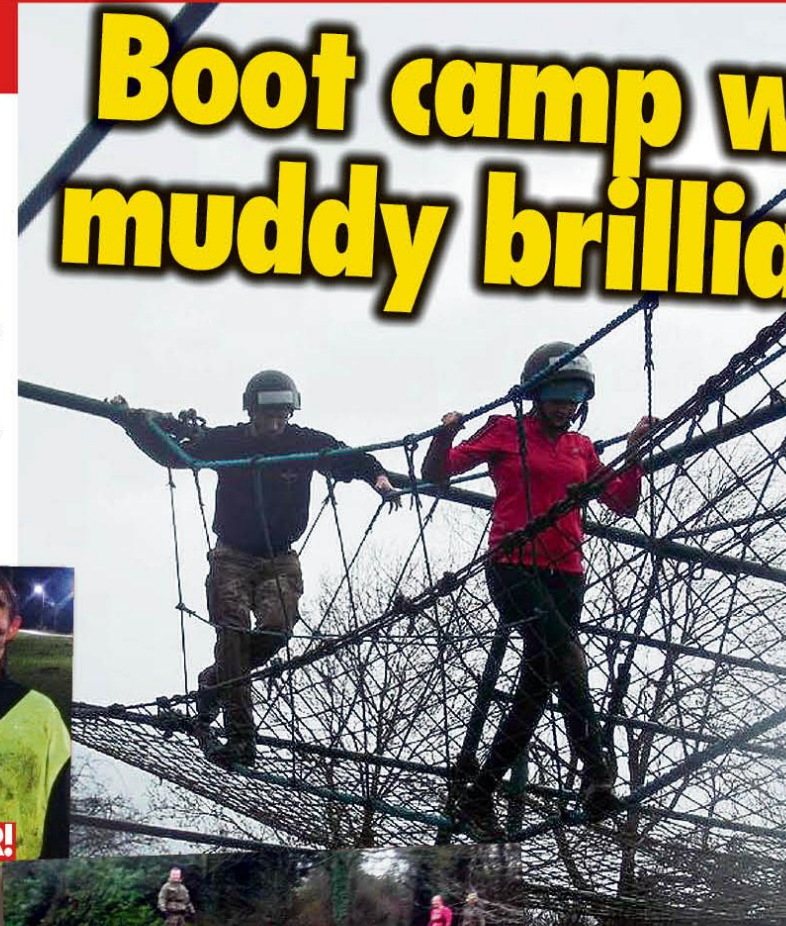
Dreams of a few cushy sessions in the gym were dashed immediately.

We were each kitted out with helmet, a training log to record our fitness test results and our aims for the weekend – and a Cadburys Creme Egg. James – the bloody sadist – explained: "It's up to you whether you eat it, but I want to see it with you at the start of each session. And if I don't, ALL of you will be punished." *Bugger...*

Day one kicked off with us being rudely awoken by Theo – aka Alan Theobald, 40, who served in the Royal Navy as a firefighter for 13 years – yelling and smashing our backdoors in at 5.45am (a time I only ever see if I'm catching a plane, or still-up drinking).

We were frogmarched outside and after a quick warm up, it was time for a three-mile run.

Halfway round, Theo, who was giving the orders along with former Paratrooper Karl Fraser, 23, stopped us at the bottom of a huge hill, then told us to crawl up and carry out 20 burpees – which is a squat



GRASS AND BURN: I'm put through my paces by the Xtreme team



thrust followed by a star jump, squats and sit ups. This, we were told, was a breather.

As we headed back to the house – we stayed at Kingham Hill High School – we were told to stop again and lie on the floor, then ordered to crawl down a muddy lane, making sure our chests were touching the ground. Thankfully, no dog turds were encountered...

After a hearty breakfast of porridge, eggs and toast – thankfully you can eat as much as you want at Xtreme Bootcamp – it was time for a fitness test.

We ran 1km, did as many sit ups and press ups as we could in two minutes, followed by keeping the plank position for as long as possible.

Next was an hour of circuits, which again saw us taking turns running up a muddy hill. And then lunch was when it all turned a bit nasty. One

of my co-guests decided to she'd scoff a mini roll.

"What's the worst that can happen?" she mumbled, wiping chocolate crumbs off her chapped lips.

We soon found out – we were ordered to do shuttle runs, squats and tuck jumps on a crash mat for 15 minutes until we'd burned off the 125 calories in the mini roll.

Mental note: don't eat the Creme Egg!

After that was an hour of swimming, taking a break to push ourselves up out of the pool and do 10 sets of press ups, and an hour of ab exercises.

Dinner was a cracking chicken curry rustled up by the school chef, Trevor.

Then we stumbled back to the house for a chat about nutrition from Theo and James. "We want you to meet your training goals while

you're here," explained James. "But we also want to educate you about how to fuel your body so you get the most out of your training."

"We give you healthy food and you can have as much of it as you want. I see the body as being like a car, so you need to put in fuel every time you exercise."

The second day was just as relentless, kicking off with 30 burpees and a three-mile run with breaks for yet more hill crawls and press-ups.

After breakfast, the rain started lashing down, but rather than take us to the indoor gym, the lads got us rolling around in puddles for our circuit session.

Muddy

"We're going to do something fun at the end," sniggered Theo, pointing to a muddy slope that Karl and James were smoothing over.

"You take a run from the top and throw yourself down face first," said James.

Our final treat was a roast turkey dinner, made again by the lovely Trevor, before we went to tackle the last challenge, a *Krypton Factor*-style assault course.

I've always been scared of heights and the thought of hauling myself over 10-foot walls fills me with terror, but James assured me: "It's just like a children's play area."

Fair enough, it had monkey bars, but it was chucking it down that much I didn't even manage to hang on to the first one, and waded through the water instead.

At the end, as I managed to grasp how to hang on to the rope swing before landing in yet more mud, I was buzzing.

I dropped a few pounds and, having been beasted for six hours each day, my stamina definitely improved.

Would I go back? Definitely. And I won't eat the Creme egg!

● To find out more, visit www.xtremebootcamps.com or call 01386 462334