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PRESENT

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DISCOVER EXPERIENCES THAT DEFY CONVENTION



Mudnificent: Ellie submerges herself  
PICTURE: KEVIN BAKER

Ellie Ross hits the great outdoors for a taste of adventure, Bear Grylls-style, at **Mudnificent 7**

**Y**OU'VE got to be joking. Deep in the Warwickshire countryside, I'm slathered in mud, have scratches all over and am quickly running out of breath.

If that's not bad enough, ahead of me is a vertical wall, with ropes slung over the top and I'm expected to launch myself over it. The trouble is, it's over twice my height, ridiculously slippery and the ropes are tantalisingly out of reach. Welcome to Mudnificent 7, where seven different obstacle course events are rolled into one gruelling race. The last leg of this 9km course is a taster of the Bear Grylls Survival Race, a new event taking place on October 3 and 4, designed to test both physical strength and mental grit.

The TV adventurer – who designed six 'survival challenges' – says it will have a 'family festival vibe' whilst still challenging all abilities and with options from a kids' race to a 30km-slog, that's easy to believe.

'It is easy to be strong at the start,' he says. 'But life and these races are all about how we react when the storms hit and blisters kick in. Tackle that obstacle head-on. The best way to get over our fears is actually to go through them.'

That's all very well, but the wall in front of me still looks insurmountable. Luckily, I have Bear Grylls ambassador and elite obstacle course racer Freya Martin running with me, giving me encouragement and tips along the way. She's already completed the race, winning the ladies' category, by the time I pitch up to Heart Park in Coventry for my later start time. After a group warm-up to '80s music, we're off – and within minutes we're leaping over hurdles.

'Keep your bum up and feet down,' Freya instructs as we're faced with our first cargo net to crawl under. She tells me to push uphill ('you can rest on the downhill') and demonstrates perfect rolls over hay bales and A-frames. My own efforts are cumbersome, but soon I'm progressing far quicker than I would



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alone. At the dreaded wall, she tells me to hit it with speed. So I charge, screaming madly before somehow hauling myself over it.

The secret to success in obstacle course racing, Freya says, is both route selection and knowing when to crank up the speed. 'You need to be strategic,' she says, as we jog towards

a terrifyingly high slide into a pool of mud. 'Look ahead and pick the fastest line. Don't make it harder for yourself by running through mud if you don't have to.'

When we hit a queue for an obstacle, I'm thankful for the breather – the combination of obstacles and uneven terrain makes this run feel like twice the distance it actually is. Then there's the mud. I lose track of the number of times I'm fully submerged in cold, wet dirt. I'm so submerged, in fact, that the stuff spills into my nostrils, eardrums, mouth – even my eyeballs. So why on earth have hundreds of people signed up to a day of physical exertion while resembling something out of The Walking Dead?

'It's a giggle,' says one guy, who is running with a mate. 'What else do you do on a Saturday morning?' Freya adds: 'Ancient man would never have contemplated expending energy like this. Modern life has become too easy – we sit at desks all week, so at the weekend people want a challenge and this fits the bill.'

Scaling walls and wading through mud are just part of what's in store for Bear's race in October. There will also be an element of surprise and when I reach today's Bear Grylls section, I suddenly find myself being shouted at by a Royal Marine, orange smoke billowing around me. Feeling fatigued, I clear more walls,



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clamber over another A-frame, wriggle under netting, then swim across a pond. I literally crawl over the finish line – slippery mud by the pond results in a final face plant – but I feel 10 feet tall. And I've been cleaning my ears out ever since.

Metro readers get a 15% discount for the Bear Grylls Adventure Weekend. See [beargryllssurvivalrace.com](http://beargryllssurvivalrace.com)  
You can pre-register for Mudnificent 7 here: [mudnificent7.co.uk](http://mudnificent7.co.uk)

## NATURAL HIGH



Way up high: Hannah attacks the high ropes course  
PICTURE: GEORGE LEDGER

Hannah Seddon heads to an untamed corner of the North West to get to grips with the **high ropes** course at Beamish Wild

**T**O SAY heights aren't my thing might be a bit of an understatement. So how have I found myself up a tree at two in the afternoon, heart in mouth, about to walk out into fresh air? Well, because you don't find adventure in your comfort zone. Or that's how I'd justified it to myself before I had a helmet and a harness on. But

here I am, ready to rock, swing and wobble through Beamish Wild's high rope activity course.

I probably should've known it was going to be nerve-racking when centre manager Alex gave me a hearty chuckle and an 'Oh dear' after I told him I was a bit nervous about heights.

The course comprises a combination of swings, zip wires and other high-altitude obstacles set in ancient woodland and there's a real mix of people taking part. The group includes a nine-year-old boy (grinning from ear-to-ear) who is already a whole stage ahead of me as I cling on to the first tree trunk for dear life. He even has time to have a sense of humour as he goes round, warning his mum, 'If you thought that one was bad, don't even look at the next one'. Which is what I've been saying to myself as I balance on what looks like a horizontal telegraph pole. The zip wire is next.

Until now, I'd thought the zip wires were going to be my friends. All I have to do is jump off, no shaking legs or wobbly ropes in sight. It turns out pushing yourself

off a platform into thin air isn't so easy, though. Fortunately, Alex steps up to the plate to help out, saying, 'Just aim for my face with your feet'. This is all the encouragement I need and once I make the leap, the ride is pretty awesome.

I'm starting to get into a rhythm by the second round, which involves climbing up and over the level you've just done. The obstacles and rope positions begin to feel a bit more familiar and hanging off the zip wire has given me way more confidence that the kit is going to do a great job of keeping me alive.

The biggest surprise, though, is that I am starting to hugely enjoy it. By the time I get to the second zip wire, I'm buzzing. I still need a gentle '1, 2, 3, go' from Alex to help me along, but the adrenaline is pumping and I feel great.

I take on the swings with a huge smile on my face. I stop looking down and start looking forward to taking the obstacles on.

'This is where she might do the splits,' I hear Alex say and I'll admit it's a close call.

Stepping across between the swings, my tactic is precision: keeping both feet on one until I have my hands firmly on the rope of the next one. This approach was mainly inspired

by watching one of the guys in the group try to tackle it with speed and miss. As much as I feel more confident than before, I still don't fancy an impromptu dangle.

By the time my feet hit solid ground again, it's been two hours since I started. That doesn't stop me immediately wanting to go again, though. Maybe heights could be my thing after all? I definitely come away from the experience with a new life motto: do the different, do what makes your heart race and you won't be able to wipe the smile off your face afterwards.

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