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DISCOVER EXPERIENCES THAT DEFY CONVENTION

# IN AT THE DEEP END

Ellie Ross takes a running jump off a cliff and lives to tell the tale...

**T**HIS is going to hurt. I'm standing on the edge of a two-storey-high cliff and I'm expected to throw myself off it. Some eight metres below is my landing point, the sea, which is rising and falling in a dizzying, swirling swell. I try to concentrate on everything I've just learned – hold onto my buoyancy aid to keep my arms in and bend my knees on impact because I'll be landing feet-first. And whatever you do, don't look down.

The trouble is, not only am I now at the same height as a sea bird in its nest, but I also have to clear a lower, jagged rock first. One slip and it will be a nasty, bumpy descent. This is coasteering, an adrenaline-fuelled method of scrambling up and then leaping off rocks into water, with plenty of swimming in between.

My three-hour session with adventure company Land & Wave takes place at Dancing Ledge, a former limestone quarry on Dorset's Jurassic

experience to enjoy it, just a reasonable level of fitness and confidence in the water.

Depending on tides, the highest jump at Dancing Ledge is around 10m, but luckily for me, there's a progressive path to the top and I start with a 3m-high cliff. 'Just march off it,' he instructs, as I teeter on the brink, my feet suddenly glued to the floor. Looking at a distant, bobbing lobster pot helps and seconds later I've plunged into a sea that's surprisingly warm and turquoise.

The next jump – 4m up – produces a louder yelp, but once again I surface unscathed. Owen explains that while coasteering is about exploring the shore close up, it's also about 'play', using the movement of the sea to have fun. I soon find myself sitting on 'The Toilet', a seat-shaped nook where the ocean flushes in and out and waves roll onto me and wash over my face.

'This stuff is good for you,' Owen yells, before another wall of water drenches us. 'You're

**Leap of faith:** Ellie throws herself into the water  
PICTURE: VICTOR FRANKOWSKI



Coast, three miles from Swanage. Its Purbeck stone was used to build parts of St Paul's Cathedral and, although quarrying here ceased more than 60 years ago, you can still see the scars of its industrial past.

As I near the craggy coastline, I pass square cut-holes in the vast rock ledge, today filled with salt water and limpets, but once used as positions for wooden cranes. It is also etched with the spiralling shells of ammonites – but I'm far too concerned about what lies ahead to start examining pre-historic fossils.

The man coaxing me to hurl myself off this rock shelf is Owen Senior, a bearded chap with big enough muscles to lift me up by my buoyancy aid when I struggle up a cliff face. He has mapped out routes and led coasteering sessions in Dorset for six years — and has watched its popularity surge.

'When we first started, we only had 80 wetsuits in circulation. Now we have 450,' he says as I pull on special gloves to protect my hands from razor-sharp rocks. 'People like coasteering because it's accessible. Unlike with other sports like surfing and climbing, it requires no prior

immersing yourself in the landscape in the best way possible. It gives you your fix of adrenaline – and sheer happiness.'

I emerge to see layers of rock towering above me – including my final hurdle, the 8m plummet. At the top, Owen counts me down, but I keep chickening out at the last moment. Finally, I go against my body's instinct for self-preservation and step into thin air. Plunging for what feels like minutes, I suddenly wonder whether I should breathe. As I inhale, I hit the water.

There's an almighty splash before it all goes quiet, with the only sound being that of bubbles near my ears. Then I'm swimming on the surface and grinning.

Amazingly, I can still move all four limbs and I'm surprised to find out that none if it actually hurt. What's even more bizarre is that I've acquired a masochistic desire to do it again. I swim back to the cliff and prepare for another leap...

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**Easy slider:** Hannah joins Chris on the way down  
PICTURE: CHRIS LEWIS

# MAD SCRAMBLE

**Ghyll scrambling** is the best adrenaline-packed activity you've never heard of. *Hannah Seddon Purkins* finds out what it's all about

**T**HE FIRST three are a baptism of fire,' says Andy, one of the instructors. 'We usually know if people are going to do it or not after these.' 'It' is ghyll scrambling: an adrenaline-inducing mix of sliding, stumbling and even abseiling downstream. And luckily for me, my adventure's set in the Lake District's stunning scenery.

I'm already suited up, so it's too late to back out now. Into the water I go with Andy's son Chris, who's also a qualified instructor. And when I say into the water, I really mean it. 'It's best to get yourself used to it fast, so just dunk yourself in completely,' Chris advises me. It's a pretty warm day but the water is still a toe-curling temperature as it trickles down my back. It's absolutely crystal-clear, though, and being able to see the floor helps me a little as I'm struggling to stay upright. 'Just keep low, lean forward and try not to end up on your bum.' I've got a sneaking suspicion Chris could navigate a riverbed blindfolded; his feet just seem to know exactly where to go.

It's not long until we're at the first slide. 'I want you to imagine you're a banana,' Chris says. It's not exactly what I'd expected, but it's an instruction I can follow. I wiggle to the edge of the rock doing my best banana impression and slide off. I can see straight away how this would get addictive and it's a big adrenaline rush as I hit the water. Going backwards and bum-first at the next slide is totally terrifying. It's only small, but thanks to the way I'm pointing, the thrill's still there.

I make it through the baptism of fire and we head off to the next challenge. Chris tells me he's been in Spain



**'KEEP LOW, LEAN FORWARD AND TRY NOT TO END UP ON YOUR BUM'**

over the summer, experiencing the ghyll scrambling opportunities on offer. Even though, by his estimations, he must have done the Stoneycroft route we're doing thousands of times before, you can tell he still absolutely loves it. His excitement really shows when we get to 'The Washing Machine', a scarily narrow plunge into the whirlpool that gives it its name. It's an opportunity to watch a pro boss the jump, but Andy makes sure I do some swirling around in it too. In fact, that's a non-negotiable!

There's a bit of rope work involved in the next part and I get the chance to abseil down the waterfall. I'd be pretty happy to do this one all day, because it's brilliant fun and I've got a huge grin on my face as I lower myself down to the bottom. I don't miss out on the opportunity to have a wild shower from the waterfall too, which is like a very cold massage.

The abseiling is eventually eclipsed in excitement by 'The Coffin Slide', which is the last attraction of the day. Andy, Chris and I park our bums in the water, creating a dam. What happens when we let go is better than any water park I've been to. The surge of the water pushes me down the narrow slide on my back and shoots me out with so much force that I end up coming out headfirst. Once I surface again, the first thing I have to say (between breaths) is, 'That... was... awesome!' and it really was.

By the time we get out of the water, I'm totally exhilarated. My advice? If you're looking for a taste of adventure and something physical that'll give you the mental challenge to match, then head for the ghylls. You'll love it.

For more info, head to [ghyllscrambling.co.uk](http://ghyllscrambling.co.uk)