

The Camp, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland

My name is Clover Stroud and I hate yoga. It isn't as if I haven't tried: from draughty community halls in Oxford to scented yoga pavilions on heavenly Keralan beaches, I've given it my best shot. The problem is I find it mind-achingly dull, a boredom only assuaged by several chocolate muffins. So for my exercise and weight-loss kick, I've been on the search for something altogether more exciting, more painful and ultimately more dramatic.

This search inevitably led me to The Camp. It was set up by two ex-Special Forces soldiers who, while serving in Afghanistan, noticed that the British Army had unwittingly created an effective weight-loss programme based on relentless physical activity. The Camp programme, devised with the help of a nutritionist, combines three cardiovascular workouts a day with low-intensity activities such as hill walking, abseiling and mountain biking. It promises clients will "drop a dress size in a week".

Run from a stately pile in Dumfries, the course is only for women. After a quick sprint around the estate wearing heart-rate monitors, the group is split into two, according to ability. The other clients on the course covered a wide range of ages and abilities, and the atmosphere was encouraging rather than deeply competitive. And encouragement was more than welcome on what is a tough course that starts daily at 5.45am with press-ups on the frosty lawn. Physical activities are interspersed with activities such as shelter building, self-defence and survival, which I initially resisted but came to welcome as a break from another punishing hill climb or boxing session. The food is excellent, but strictly calorie-controlled, so within a group of 20 women, tempers can get a bit frayed. Luckily, the Marines and SAS instructors running the course are experienced at keeping morale high in far more challenging circumstances than up a Scottish hillside, and the pain of another round of sit-ups or an icy river crossing is assuaged by the fact that there's a good-looking Marine yelling encouragement at you.

The average weight loss was 7lb – I lost 6lb and, more significantly, have gone on to lose another 7lb. I now run regularly and go to boxing classes, and I think I can credit The Camp with having changed my life.

CLOVER STROUD

■ The Camp (0870 033 2375 www.thecamp.co.uk). The seven-night course costs from £1,450, based on two sharing, including all meals, equipment and insurance.