

UNLEASH YOUR INNER ANIMAL BY TRYING 'WILD RUNNING' - IT WILL MAKE A TRAIL RUN MORE FUN AND WILL BE BENEFICIAL TO YOUR BODY, SAYS HAZEL SILLVER

BORN TO BE WILD



Watch a child explore the countryside. While adults walk or jog along the path, kids will constantly veer off to jump over a pile of fallen logs or swing from the branches of a tree. All for fun of course! Us grown-ups are too distant from nature. We've forgotten how to play and how to move our bodies naturally. We may admire the view as we run along, but it doesn't occur to most of us to physically include the landscape in our workout.

WHAT IS WILD RUNNING?

To run wild is to incorporate the countryside into your regular trail run. As well as running upright as you normally do, you add in all sorts of other movements via the landscape. For example, if there is a slope, you might drop to all fours to scale it. If there is a low tree branch, you might do five arm pull-ups on it. If there is a rock, you might lift it and throw it a few times.

'Exercising via the landscape is free and it's what the human body is meant to do,' says Colin Holding, a coach with Wild Fitness (www.wildfitness.com), a company that teaches people to move their bodies naturally, in the natural environment. 'It's being in tune with nature and it's fun. Watch kids move - running for them is just the quickest way of getting to the next fun activity, be it climbing, jumping, throwing or balancing.'

In essence, wild running is including features of the landscape on your run, in order to create an obstacle course for yourself. It's how humans were built to move across the countryside.

Advanced wild running might include stopping to climb a tree,



A weekend retreat with Wild Fitness encourages you to have fun in nature



jumping over a stream or bear crawling over rocks.



Games and interaction can only enhance your enjoyment of running

NATURAL MOVEMENT

On a wild run, you will be moving your body in a variety of natural ways in order to strengthen it. Many of us stick to one form of motion (such as running) at the expense of our other muscle groups and movement skills

(such as balance and flexibility). As well as making sure you give all your muscles and movement skills a workout, wild exercise teaches you to move without tension and in a way that's good for your body. For example, squatting to lift something instead of bending over. Adjust your body to accommodate each motion, as an animal does.



BE A WILD WOMAN!

FIVE WILD RUNNING EXERCISES TO TRY

- **Throwing** Pick up and throw stones or logs.
- **Crawling** Clamber up slopes or over rocks on all fours.
- **Jumping** Jump from one side of the path to the other.
- **Climbing** Climb trees and rocky slopes.
- **Balancing** Walk along fallen logs.

THE HISTORY OF WILD RUNNING

Moving naturally is nothing new, of course. However, humans have largely lost such movement skills. In an attempt to remind us, military man Georges Hébert wrote a book called *Natural Method* in 1912, extorting the benefits of returning to our inherent animal motion and inspiring the army obstacle

fitness courses of today. Various modern-day athletes now follow and teach his theory. The training system MovNat (www.movnat.com) uses Hébert's method and teaches it in stages, from beginner to advanced natural movement, and the company Wild Fitness runs personal training sessions and fitness holidays that teach people how to exercise via the natural landscape.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

A lot of non-stop aerobic activity is often assumed to be the best sort of training. However, while it's extremely beneficial, sustaining it isn't as rewarding for the body as aerobic exercise interspersed with other types of movement.

'High-intensity interval training (such as a wild run) has huge benefits compared to voluminous aerobic movement,' says Colin. 'So we would always encourage as much variety of movement as possible.'

The addition of new movements to your trail run will improve your running performance no end. 'High-intensity cross training has huge carry-over effects on your preferred sport,' says Colin. 'Therefore we should be great generalists – the more variety within our fitness programme the better.'

Another massive benefit is the relaxing effect of the natural environment. In a recent study, the University of Essex found that doing activities in nature dramatically increases wellbeing, compared to indoor exercise. So why not do resistance and flexibility work during your trail run, instead of at the gym?

STAY SAFE

When beginning to wild run, take it slowly. Add in just a couple of new movements, such as throwing and jumping, at a time and don't over-exert yourself.

'Any new movement pattern you are not used to is a challenge for your neuronal and muscular systems,' says Colin, 'so build each skill and then slowly add intensity, volume and skill level. Do things that are within your capacity. If you over-challenge yourself, you'll get injured, feel demoralised, or both. Take it easy and have fun.'

ENJOY YOURSELF

A key part of wild fitness is play. 'Play stimulates the release of oxytocin in the body, which makes you feel good,' says Colin. The Wild Fitness activity holidays and



Get together with your running friends and organise some wild games



Service with a smile: great food is standard at a Wild Fitness weekend



'EMBRACING THE WILD RUNNING MENTALITY IS LIBERATING AND MAKES TRAIL RUNNING MUCH MORE FULFILLING AND FUN'

weekends involve fun exercises in groups or pairs. For example, playing tag, copying the leader's dance moves or jumping over the other participants' arms.

If you run with a friend, why not stop to play a game? Try this Wild Fitness exercise to build muscle reaction – one of you drops a stick and the other tries to catch it before it hits the ground. Another Wild Fitness game is to chase your partner's shadow.

'Use your imagination to create your own games,' says

Colin. 'Be playful, elastic, exuberant and energetic.'

Embracing the wild running mentality is liberating, and makes trail running more fun and fulfilling. When you interact with the landscape in ways that are beneficial to your body, you are moving as the animal you really are. What better way to leave the stress of the office behind!

Adults love messing about. It makes us feel good. So go on – stop to play some fitness games when you run with your friends. ☑

FIVE SAFETY TIPS
YOU MAY HEAR THE CALL OF THE WILD, BUT YOU STILL NEED TO TAKE CARE...



Don't slip Don't try to balance on wet logs or jump off wet rocks.

Field boundaries Only climb and flip over a gate if it's very sturdy. Don't climb over stone walls or old gates – you may do them (or yourself) damage.

Thorns Don't climb trees with thorns.

Squat Don't bend over to lift things – squat instead to protect your back.

Size matters If you're not Geoff Capes, don't try to throw a huge stone!

more info

If you want to learn all sorts of fun games and natural movement skills, contact **Wild Fitness** (www.wildfitness.com, 020 3286 4886). As well as offering group training and one-to-one sessions in London, it runs fitness weekends and holidays. **MovNat** (www.movnat.com) is based in America, but runs workshops in London and Devon.