

Happy campers



To many, the word bootcamp conjures up images of aggressive men shouting orders. But when Vicki Foster attended a fitness bootcamp in the heart of Kent, she found that this could not have been further from the truth



As I drove to a secluded farm in Rochester, my nerves were starting to build – having never attended a bootcamp before, I did not have a clue what to expect.

However, after being greeted by Sharon Smith, who founded G.I Jane Bootcamp with her sister, Mandy, my nerves disappeared. I was here to become part of a group of eight women who each had a common goal, to lose weight but to have fun at the same time.

As I waited for the group to return from swimming, I sipped green tea and found out that the ladies had already taken part in circuit training and cricket. And it was only 10am.

The group would be here for seven days and I was joining them on their first full day. And although they returned exhausted from their swim, it was clear they had already bonded and were having fun. Each woman would be



Bootcamp photographs by Vicki Foster

spending their time at the farm cut off from friends and families and undergoing a strict exercise regime. Groups are led by two serving marines, who push the girls to their limits, but in a fun, challenging way.

One of the participants, Roxanne Baverstock from Welling, came to the bootcamp after having a baby a few months previously. The 20-year-old said: "My main aim is to lose weight because I eat too much, and love big portions."

Roxanne weighed 12 stone and wanted to be ideally eight and a half stone. Excited about the challenges ahead and looking forward to abseiling and boxing, she pledged that when the bootcamp finished she planned to attend the gym three times a week and go swimming.

G.I Jane Bootcamp, which is based in Whitehall Farm in Hoo, was founded by sisters Sharon and Mandy Smith after they attended a bootcamp in the north of England and realised there was nothing like it in Kent. "I think it is brilliant for women, it really builds their confidence," Sharon told me.

The company takes women on a complete lifestyle change, with activities including aerobics, walking, abseiling and boxing, all of which is carried out in a peaceful environment, away from the stresses of life.

Their diet is also monitored and meals are catered for by an on-site chef who gears them towards 1,500 calories a day, the recommended number of calories for a female adult.

And on the day I attended the group was given a talk by nutritional consultant, Shelley Davies, who gave the participants some top tips, including chewing your food well and avoiding shopping when hungry.

Lunch consisted of tuna, a wholemeal pitta bread and red cabbage with baby tomatoes. And while it was very tasty and filling, I did have a craving for chocolate afterwards.

Then it was time for a two hour walk, and Jane Turkington from Lee told me why she was taking part: "I do not like my body and what I see in the mirror," she said. "I just want to get back to where I was a few years ago."

Jane weighed 14 and a half stone and ideally wanted to get to 12 and a half stone. She added: "It is quite refreshing, I am really enjoying it."

We struggled up steep hills and over fields until we found a place to have a snack – a tiny amount of yummy cheese and celery. As small as it was, it filled me up and helped recharge my batteries.

The ladies then embarked on a bike ride, but for me, the walk ended on a high. After a few hours in the fresh air I felt energetic and energised – I could have even done it all over again!

If you want to lose weight, tone up and meet new friends in a fun, and challenging way, then G.I Jane Bootcamp could be just what you are looking for.

For more information, visit gijanebootcamp.co.uk or call 020 8301 4353.

*By the end of the week, the average weight loss was eight pounds. Roxanne Baverstock lost nine pounds and Jane Turkington lost 15 pounds, the most weight out of the whole group.

Sharon and Mandy Smith, founders of G.I Jane Bootcamp

