

Erwan Le Corre is a trailblazer in the world of fitness, but he doesn't hold with strict routine, or mindless repetition. His way is based on taking people back to nature. **Claire Smith** tracked him down

HE HAS been called “one of the fittest men on the planet” – but you won't find him pumping iron or running on a treadmill in a conventional gym.

Frenchman Erwan Le Corre would rather be swinging on a branch, hurling a boulder or running barefoot through a forest than working out in a room full of state-of-the-art machines and high-energy disco music.

The 39-year-old is the inventor of MovNat, a new kind of workout – which uses natural movements and natural environments to help its followers gain maximum fitness and flexibility.

Le Corre, who recently lectured to Nasa scientists, and gave his first workshop in Scotland this week, says he wants people who use his method to feel “liberated and invigorated”.

“Looking fit and being fit is a totally different business. Looking fit is all about being a mirror athlete.”

“I tell people what I am going to teach is not how to run and jump but more efficient ways to run and jump.

“As a species we didn't learn to run fast so we could win gold medals in the Olympics. We developed the ability to run as a way to catch an animal or to avoid being eaten. That is why it suits us and that is where it comes from.”

Thousands of people around the world have watched Le Corre's wilderness fitness clips on YouTube. In them he runs barefoot through forests, vaults over rocks and throws boulders – using the natural environment as the world's biggest gym. In person Le Corre does not immediately look like a superfit athlete. He is tall and slender and doesn't have huge arms or bulging thighs. But something happens when he starts to move.

When *The Scotsman* photographer turns up to take a suitably outdoorsy photograph, Le Corre effortlessly leaps off a bridge by the Water of Leith and leaps around the branches of a tree like a superhero.

He laughs when I ask him if he is really the world's fittest man: “It's not me that says I am the fittest man – but other people have said it. It is true I was described

“It's not me that says I am the fittest man – others have said it. But usually fit guys are fit in one way”

by *Men's Health* magazine as one of the fittest men in the world. There are probably a lot of other guys who could be described as one of the fittest guys. But overall I can do anything, I can swim, I can fight, I can lift and carry. Usually fit guys are fit in one way.”

Rannoch Donald, the Scottish coach whose organisation Simple Strength organised the workshop and who hopes to bring Le Corre back to Scotland for a wilderness camp next year, says: “There is a real buzz about Erwan. It is a real coup to bring him to Scotland.

“He embodies a particular lifestyle. The way he is is a result of how he lives. I think you just look at the guy and you can see how healthy he is.

“The films on YouTube were a bit romantic with him running across beaches and through woods. But I think a lot of people looked at those films and thought: ‘I want to be like him.’”

Le Corre traces his fascination with physical fitness back to his childhood on the outskirts of Paris, when his father, who was from Brittany, used to take him for long hikes and adventures in the countryside. “My dad pushed my limits. When I was a kid I was afraid of heights and he pushed me to go beyond my fears.

“When most parent would try to dissuade their kids from stuff – saying you will hurt yourself or you'll get dirty, why don't you go inside – he would encourage me to do it. He taught me courage, to push my limits.

“He wanted his son to be healthy and strong – but he himself was not taking care of his health. His diet was not good and he smoked too much.”

Le Corre practised sports in his youth without becoming too involved. But in his early twenties he got into an underground extreme fitness group which would practise on the streets of Paris at night.

“Between 19 and 26 I would have a job – but on the side I would train with a little group... it was what you might call extreme training. We would climb bridges without a harness, climb scaffolding, make jumps.

“It was not about making something accepted. It was



Erwan Le Corre has adapted his urban techniques to the great outdoors, and has devised a training

Into the



Erwan Le Corre, left, and giving a lecture, above

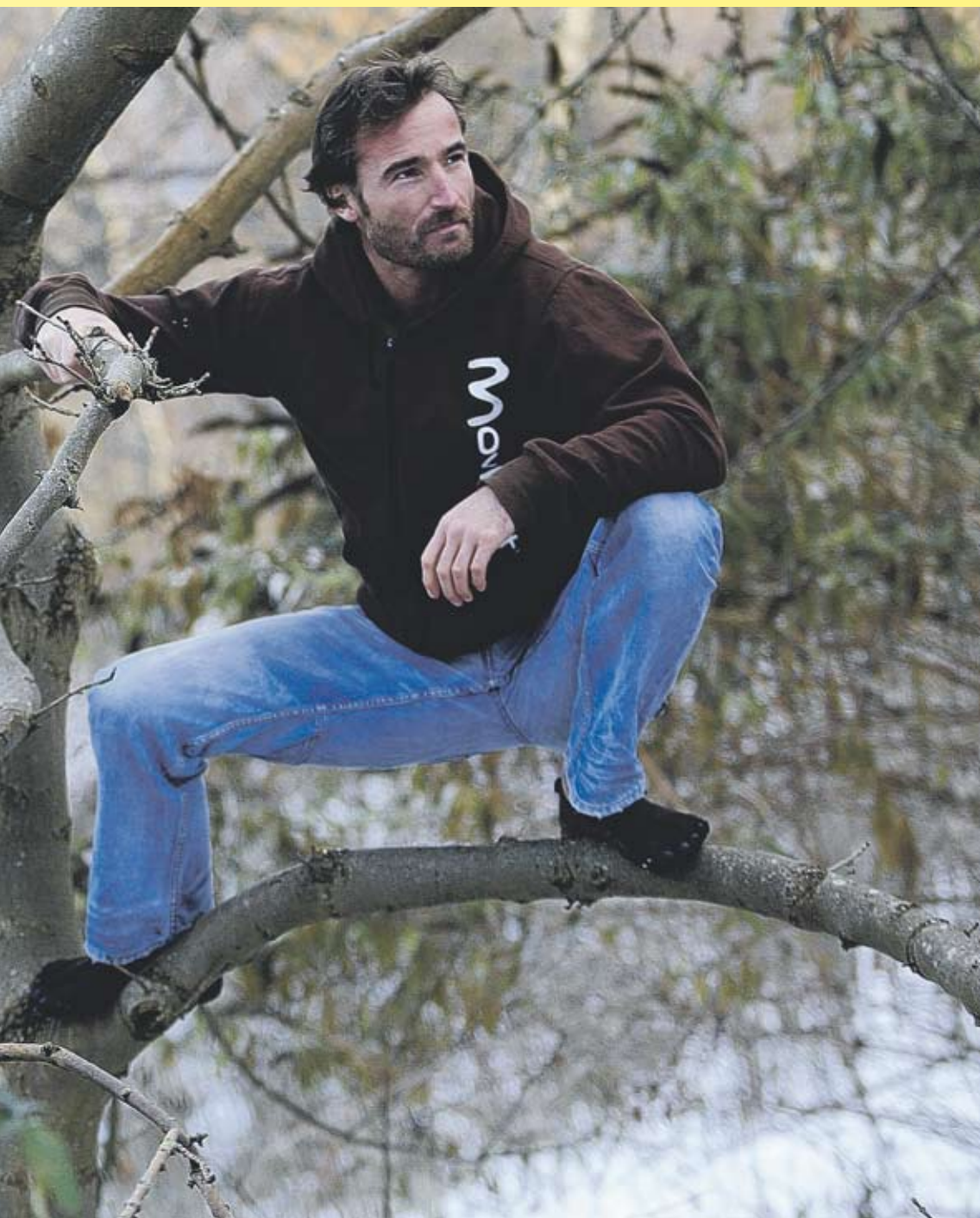
about training underground in a very secretive way. And this was before the internet – before everybody had these little cameras.”

Some of the guerrilla fitness experts Le Corre used to run around Paris with at night went on to become involved with what became known as freerunning and parkour. He himself developed a reputation as a wilder-

ness man. “I did it on my own for many years and then I discovered the theories of natural movement developed by Georges Hébert and it felt very familiar to me.”

Le Corre studied Hébert's ideas – Hébert believed exercise regimes should be based on the example of native peoples and the natural activities they integrate in their lives – and developed them into his own system, which he calls MovNat (moving naturally). As well as having thousands of internet fans he now lectures and gives workshops and runs training camps around the world. He's recently signed a book and DVD deal. In keeping with his back-to-nature approach he recommends the paleo diet – which involves eating mostly meat, fish, fruit and nuts.

Certainly the weekend course at the Combat Ready martial arts centre in Edinburgh has attracted a dedicated crowd of natural fitness devotees. A parkour trainer has travelled from Belgium, a couple of guys have come from the Primal Gym in Manchester and there is a professor from England who is studying the science of evolution and exercise. With Scotland blanketed with snow and ice – today's workshop will be held indoors.



system which encourages exercise in natural environments, just like Tarzan, below

Picture: Jayne Emsley

WILD

Le Corre says: "A lot of people think MovNat means training outdoors – but it is really about moving naturally. If you can work outside in the natural world then that's perfect – but sometimes it is not practical. If we were to work outside in this sort of weather it might be difficult and dangerous – it would be good for our mental strength but maybe not much else."

"People sometimes think natural movement has to be done in the wild – but if you bring a leg press machine into the woods it doesn't make it natural."

But there is nothing artificial about this workout

"If we continue like this maybe in 200 years people will say: 'I heard my grandfather used to walk'"

– and definitely no machines. The session takes place in a bare gym on a soft floor and those taking part are barefoot or in minimal shoes – many of those taking part are wearing five finger trainers – which have built-in toes.

Participants are shown how to swivel and squat as if they are climbing over and ducking under branches in a forest. They are shown how lie on the floor and edge backwards using their shoulders as if hunting prey or escaping from predators.

It's energetic but quite playful. Watching him teach it is clear Le Corre is passionate about helping people rediscover the joy of natural movement.

"Today nobody needs to run – in fact nobody needs to walk. If we continue like this maybe in 200 years time people will say: 'I heard my grandfather used to walk... and my father could stand up.'"

"It is all about not falling into routines. Routines kill your ability to adapt. Routines make us boring. It is our ability to adapt which makes us strong."



LE CORRE GUIDE TO FITNESS

WALKING: STEP OVER, DUCK UNDER

WHEN you are out in the woods look for branches you have to step over and duck under.

This enhances your balance, stability and co-ordination – but it is also about mindfulness. If you don't step over or duck you might get hit by a branch.

You don't do a particular exercise because it is good for a particular body part. You do it because it is fun and it appeals to you. The fun resides in the challenge to adapt to your environment. The physical improvement is the beneficial outcome, but you need to find instant gratification in doing exactly what you're doing when you're doing it.

RUNNING BAREFOOT OR WITH THIN-SOLED SHOES

I RUN barefoot – but you have to prepare. Start with minimal shoes. Land on the balls of your feet first, then let the heels lightly touch the ground and recoil, just like how you land when skipping rope. If you use big trainers you will probably land heavier on your heels – when you run barefoot you can't afford to do that because it will hurt. It pushes you to run more naturally and efficiently.

BALANCING

FIND a fallen tree branch which is not too thick and not too high, unstable or slippery – so if it breaks or if you fall you are safe – and try to balance on it. The tip here is to relax your arms and not try to rely too much on them. You want to control your balance using your core strength and keep your knees and hips aligned. Balancing increases balance, and a better balance transfers to many areas of movement, including running, for instance.

JUMPING

YOU can choose between dropping off something or jumping between two flat stones for instance. You don't actually need to jump between two boulders where there is a 50ft drop to make progress – you are equally challenged at ground level and it is safer. Bend your knees and swing your arms backwards then forwards before you push up your legs. You will create an additional momentum that will push you further than if you try to jump pushing on your legs only.

CLIMBING: BRANCH PULL UPS

YOU can climb up a rope but you can also do pull ups on a tree branch.

Find a branch you can dead hang from. Hold it with your palms forward and try to pull yourself up. The aim is to try to place both elbows flat along the branch. If it's too hard to pull your body up only by your arms, jump off the ground pushing on your legs first, then pull on your arms as high as you can. The more you practise, the less you will push on your legs and the more you will be able to pull your body up.

CLIMBING TREE TRUNKS

GRASP a narrow tree trunk with both hands then try to place both feet on the tree. Just holding the position is going to be difficult – but see if you can do two steps up the tree trunk. Step up one and two steps with the feet then one and two steps with the arms. The tip here is to focus on the foot placement and try to place most bodyweight on your feet rather than your hands. As you move up push on your legs and try to keep your arms straight so that most of the effort is handled by your lower limbs.

CRAWLING OR BEAR WALKING

THE tip here is to relax to the max. Keep your chest down. Learning to move like a bear is all about selective tension – alternate tension and relaxing. If you get too tense it is really hard to move. You can go in a straight line or just loop around, move backwards, sideways, and also step over obstacles or duck and crawl under them. Play with exploring variations.

LIFT, THROW AND CATCH

YOU need a partner for this. Take a stone and throw and catch it between you. When you throw bend your knees and let your arms swing back between your legs. Keep your lower back super straight at all times, by sticking your backside out. You generate power by driving your hips forward. It's all in the hip swing! When you catch do the same.

BBC reveals its tips for the top in pop charts

BEN MITCHELL

THE next big things predicted to hit the music scene in the coming year have been named.

The 15 "most exciting rising stars" of music were announced in the BBC's Sound Of 2011.

The longlist was compiled using recommendations from more than 160 influential UK tastemakers who were asked to name their favourite new acts.

Last year's winner was Ellie Goulding, while others who have taken the title in the list's nine-year history have included Little Boots, Adele, Mika, Corinne Bailey Rae and 50 Cent.

The up-and-coming artists this year range from singer-songwriters Anna Calvi, Daley and Clare Maguire to pop starlet Jessie J and London grime MC Wretch 32. Also featured are cutting-edge producers and vocalists including James Blake, Nero, Jai Paul and Jamie Woon.

Rock bands Mona and The Vaccines are named along with guitar groups Esben and the Witch, Warpaint and Yuck.

New Zealand five-piece The Naked & Famous are also on the longlist.

George Ergatoudis, head of music, BBC Radio 1 and iXtra, said: "There are many lists of hotly tipped acts, but I believe the BBC's Sound Of list now stands out as the definitive one, thanks to the rigour applied to its compilation and its comprehensive range of contributors including tastemakers from radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and online."

"Over the years it has helped music fans discover some fantastic artists and while some have disappeared without a trace there have also been notable successes including Dizzee Rascal, Keane, the Kaiser Chiefs, Plan B, Adele and Florence And The Machine, to name just a few."

Mark Sutherland, global editor of *Billboard* magazine, said: "Unlike previous years, there are few dead certs when it comes to predicting what will be big in 2011, and this list reflects that."

The winner as well as the top five will be revealed in early January.

Budget gender challenge lost

THE Fawcett Society has been refused permission to challenge the legality of the coalition's emergency Budget.

A QC for the gender equality group told a High Court judge the Budget cuts were having a "grossly disproportionate and devastating" impact on women, who were having to bear the brunt of the cuts triggered in jobs, benefits and services.

The Society was applying for permission to seek a declaration the government had acted unlawfully by formulating June's Budget "without paying due regard to gender equality laws".

But Mr Justice Ouseley ruled the application "unarguable – or academic" and dismissed it.