



NATURALLY FIT

By emphasizing functional movement and a reconnection to primal roots, MovNat clinics take you into the woods and help you once again become the animal you are.



BY JEN SINKLER



Top: MovNat founder Erwan Le Corre (center), instructors Vic Verdier (left) and Clifton Harski (right), with Jen Sinkler (front). **Bottom:** How to safely transfer rocks is one of the many skills taught during workshops.

I'm en route from a convention hall packed with immaculately groomed personal trainers in glitzy, crime-against-nature Las Vegas, and on my way to MovNat, a woodsy, primal-fitness workshop being hosted at a campsite near Summersville Lake in West Virginia. I'm exhausted from the frenetic pace of Vegas, from mainlining information via lectures and "networking" late enough to ponder the changing hues of the sky.

I leave Nevada physically and emotionally threadbare. What I want to do is lie inert for the next week, sleeping my way back to health and vitality. What Erwan Le Corre, 40-year-old founder of MovNat (and this month's *Experience Life* cover subject), has in mind, however, is something completely different — though with the same end goal.

MovNat, short for Move Naturally, is a mind-body approach to fitness — and, on a grander scale, to life. Participants get a chance to reconnect with their ancestral selves by redeveloping "situationally intelligent" strength, skills and abilities.

Some typical instructions: *Cross that stream by jumping from rock to rock. Climb that tree. Stalk your prey. Carry this log. Move that rock. Swim across this lake. Transport your injured friend back to safety. Fight off that attacker.*

"We can reinvent ourselves in a lot of ways, but not biologically," says Le

Corre, a French native. "It feels good to move this way because it's what we're meant to do — it's an expression of who we are. MovNat teaches you how to immerse yourself in the here and now out of biological necessity." (For more on primal fitness, see page 63.)

Each year, at prime wilderness sites in West Virginia and Thailand, MovNat hosts five- to seven-day workshops, respectively, during which groups of up to 14 attendees reside alongside instructors, participating in as many as five training sessions per day, from dawn to dusk. (MovNat also holds one- and two-day workshops in local parks and health clubs throughout the United States and Canada.)

Next year, Le Corre will launch a MovNat certification course, but for now, the MovNat staff consists of him and two fellow instructors: 43-year-old Vic Verdier, a pseudo-stern self-defense expert who spends much of his time in Thailand, and 29-year-old Clifton Harski, a classically trained strength coach from San Diego who cooks a mean rack of pork ribs.

Busting Out of the Zoo

MovNat was born in 2008 out of Le Corre's conviction that most of us have become "zoo humans": caged, confined creatures out of touch with our primal instincts and abilities, suffering from chronic pain, depression and disease as a result.



Left: Carrying logs is all part of a day's activities for Jen Sinkler and other campers. **Middle:** Each summer, the instructors use branches to construct an interstate system between trees. **Right:** Strength activities are built into group runs.

Le Corre himself escaped from the zoo early. During his childhood, his father imparted to him an abiding love of the outdoors, and Le Corre's strong, graceful build lent itself well to most forms of activity. By age 18, he'd become a black belt in karate, and a year later, he became a daredevil apprentice to a Parisian natural-lifestyle guru who practiced and taught Le Corre what could be categorized as an early form of parkour.

Together, they performed stunts throughout the city and tested the limits of their physical abilities. (For more on that practice, search for "The Joy of Parkour" at experiencelife.com.)

"I believe our true nature is to be strong, healthy, happy and free," he says. "I am fueled by beauty. I smell, I feel, I connect. It makes me thrive." Le Corre tempers such poetic tendencies with a fierce sense of function when it comes to physical movement.

"I am not impressed with your bodeeeee," says the thickly accented Le Corre to attendee Garrett Renon, a 30-year-old personal trainer and engineer for the Department of Defense. "It's how you use it that matters." Such zingers are delivered gently but with pointed accuracy: Although Renon has granite abs, he struggles to mount the high bars on our first day.

"Chihuahuas evolved from wolves, did you know that?" Le Corre asks us.



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— Erwan Le Corre

"What *happened* to those guys, and do you want it to happen to you, too?"

When he says this, I have the unsettling realization that I've gone a step beyond zoo animal: I've become a full-on domesticated house pet, fashioning my own leash by tethering myself to the nearest electrical outlet at every opportunity.

But there is hope, for me and for the rest of the group. Le Corre calls his workshops "rehab," and he and his staff are going to help us get clean. The process involves a lot of dirt.

Learning the Moves

The first session involves a battery of filmed assessments that we'll use to measure our progress later. We try our hand at precision jumping, leaping from board to board. We attempt to twirl our way onto a high bar system created by securing relatively skinny logs to surrounding trees. (I benefit from observing a couple of other camp-

ers with experience at one- or two-day workshops, and manage to find my way up; others are not so lucky.) We walk an impromptu balance beam, turning and squatting while trying to appear relaxed. We shoulder a sizeable log, and run a short length of trail.

On the final day, we will repeat all these tests and leave for home with the comparisons on DVD so that we can marvel at our progress. On day one, however, none of this looks good or feels natural. The group is nearly silent in that way that strangers are with each other when everyone is functioning beyond their comfort level.

The exception is Australian Brad Osborn, a 38-year-old world masters decathlete and volleyball player who has enthusiastically incorporated MovNat principles he learned during an earlier workshop into his daily training. It shows in his mastery of the movements. He is useful: He serves as a point the rest of the group can unite against.

During another early session, Le Corre leads us from the breakfast table near our tents into the adjacent woods and orders us onto our backs in a nearby clearing. I scan the area for a less, well, *dirty* spot. Finding none, I reluctantly turn myself over to the experience. He has us shift around in the filth while paying attention to different points of support and the effects of gravity on our bodies. This is →



From top: Crossing a smelly bog is part of the last day's challenge; Sinkler practices partner carries; the Paleo meals include lots of fresh veggies and fruits; at Summersville Lake, participants learn proper swim and breathing techniques, but also cavort on the rope swing.

followed by some rolling around so that we can experiment with momentum, which he calls "body-weight transfer." It's all meant to bring more mindfulness to our actions; I remain especially aware of the mud seeping in through the back of my shirt and shorts.

This mindfulness extends to each of our training sessions, whether we are hefting rocks or logs, balancing on or traversing elevated balance beams, climbing ropes or trees, practicing self-defense, learning breathing techniques, swimming, or running. (MovNat teaches a light-on-your-feet running technique nimble enough for bare feet and sudden obstacles on forest floors.)

All three of the instructors are impressively competent at each of the disciplines, but Le Corre is cat-quick and completely feral — and he knows it. "I want you to see how easy these things are for me," he says. "And I want you to say, 'I can be like that.'"

Primitive Satisfaction

By the second morning, the mood is different, lighter. There's more chatter and a collectively relieved awareness that we will likely survive. "I feel like our group is about to have a breakthrough," I remark.

"A breakthrough or a breakdown?" asks David Thompson, 34-year-old director of product management for iPass in Redwood Shores, Calif. In 2006 Thompson lost 70 pounds, and has kept it off through a Paleo diet and an emphasis on primal movements during training sessions.

MovNat serves an entirely Paleo menu, and included are seasonal vegetables and fruits, high-quality cuts of meat, and healthy fats. Noticeably absent are grains and dairy. (For more on Paleo, see my column in the November 2011 issue at experiencelife.com.) Since many of us have already made this switch prior to arrival, the eggs, salmon, salad, coconut and olive oils, and aforementioned ribs Harski prepares for us are met with pleasure, not complaints of deprivation.

We fall into a comfortable rhythm, and we become friends. In the mornings, spider fights occurring on the top of my tent become a makeshift alarm clock (daddy longlegs love to

battle!), and in the evenings, the sound of zippers closing becomes something of a death knell; campers drop shortly after dinner dishes are done each night. It is a simple and satisfying daily rhythm.

Take-Home Message

On the final day, Le Corre leads us on a challenge course that normally lasts an hour and a half. We are treated to two and a half hours, he says, because as a group, we have made rare and substantial progress.

"I won't ask you to do anything I won't do first," Le Corre says. Nervous laughter ripples through the group — we've heard rumors of the rank bog you have to splash through. (They are true.) As we migrate through the woods, we apply each of the skills we've learned throughout the week, bear crawling through brambles, scaling and tight-roping narrow branches, ducking under fallen trees, leaping lightly from rock to rock, always moving, always aware.

It is indisputable: We have made marked progress. Beyond that, the confidence and vigor of delighting in these new skills permeates all our interactions, and I find myself hoping this feeling won't fade.

Le Corre assures us it doesn't have to. MovNat, he says, is not just a program but a lifestyle, and he encourages us to ask ourselves, after we arrive home, how we can move more naturally regardless of our environment.

"You don't have to be barefoot in the woods. You don't have to get scratches and bug bites," says Le Corre. "You can apply these principles in your gym — you just have to choose a practical task based on your current environment. That's MovNat." 🌀

Jen Sinkler is Experience Life's senior fitness editor and one happy camper.

WEB EXTRA!

For a list of MovNat prerequisites and ideas for other primal getaways, see the online version of this article at experiencelife.com.