

Upgrade

ANDY TORBET'S GREAT BRITISH

ADVENTURES

Enhance your weekend (and your survival skills while you're at it) with the help of Britain's ballsiest explorer

PHOTOGRAPHY: Glen Burrows



Andy Torbet has huge balls, and we're not talking about his actual testicles – (these may be abnormally sized but, frankly, that's none of our business). We're referring metaphorically to the fearless feats he takes on and conquers by way of a day job. The former Royal Engineer, now a pro explorer – you might recognise him from spots on the BBC's *Coast* and *The One Show* – has scuba-dived flooded Welsh mines, axe-climbed the White Cliffs of Dover and pot-holed his way through the Cave Of Skulls (every bit as terrifying as it sounds). Now, though, the 39-year-old Scot is on his toughest mission yet: to get the British public to embrace the spirit of adventure. Over to Andy...

"I'm not about to suggest you lob yourself out of a plane at 30,000ft or get your toes and everything else wet with a spot of caving. Actually no, hang on a minute, that is exactly what I suggest you do – it's bloody brilliant. Just perhaps not this weekend. Such pursuits take years of training and experience to pull off. No one was born an extreme diver or ice-wall climber, but you have to start somewhere, so why not here?"

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GRAB A SNORKEL

► I'm more known for doing deep dives or cave diving using some serious equipment, but I still get a lot of use out of my humble snorkel. There are tens of thousands of miles of coastline, rivers and lakes in the UK and only a tiny fraction of this has been properly explored, yet most of it is shallow enough water to easily investigate. I've dived into shipwrecks, sunken WWII planes, caves, waterfalls, lakes and mountain pools with just this simple bit of kit.

Fins help to propel you through the water and a wetsuit is handy so you can spend longer in freezing cold temperatures without anything important dropping off. But if you've got a mask and a snorkel – presuming you can swim – you're good to go.



Swanage Pier

An easy introduction with plenty of life and light around the pillars of the pier. The water is usually clear and clean and you'll find pubs, ice cream and fish and chips by the water's edge. The perfect dive site.



Bridge of Orchy

Something a bit wilder. The River Orchy flows into a deep section under a bridge a few miles upstream from the village of the same name. Here you'll find a submerged gorge, water-carved rock formations and huge salmon all visible through the clear, if peat-tinted, water – like diving in whisky.



The west coast

Along the UK's western periphery, from Cornwall to the Outer Hebrides, you can swim nose-to-nose with the second largest fish in the sea: the benign 30-ft-long basking shark.

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MAKE A FIRE

(NO STICK-RUBBING NECESSARY)

► I used to run expedition training weekends and people were surprised when it came to the fire-lighting section: I'd produce a lighter and, just to get the party started, some petrol. If, on a planned expedition, you find yourself needing to make fire the paleo-way, you've messed up badly. Rubbing two sticks (or squirrels) together is an extremely difficult and laborious skill to master, especially in the UK where the ground is usually sodden.

Plan ahead and consider taking a firelighting kit with some tinder (wood shavings or cotton wool soaked in Vaseline) and a means of lighting it. I like a flint and steel as they don't run out and will work even if they've been underwater all day. If you're camping, though, ditch all that; I pack a small gas stove with a built-in ignition. Perfect for when it's cold, dark and wet and all you want to do is get a brew on.



► Fancy jumping out of a plane? Of course you do. A tandem jump with an instructor is fine but it's far cooler to do it yourself. You can do an Accelerate Freefall (AFF) Level 1 in around

half a day, which means being able to exit an aircraft from 15,000ft up. You won't be totally on your own – a couple of instructors will fall with you – but the jump, fall and chute-pull are

all done by you. Do another 16 jumps and you're a licensed skydiver. Nothing says "up yours, world" like diving head-first out of an aluminium tube in the sky.

04 BE GUIDED BY THE STARS



► OK, we all have smartphones or watches that tell us where the nearest Wetherspoons is, but to impress the young lady friend you're stepping out with, how about navigating using the stars? It's also handy if you're lost in the wilds with no phone signal.

Once you know where north is, you can determine where the other main directions are. First, locate the constellation known as The Big Saucepan or The Plough or, as I prefer, The Great Bear (far more manly than kitchenware or medieval agriculture in my opinion).

Imagine a line between the last two stars (the end of the pot rather than the handle) and extend it upwards, roughly five times the distance between them. There you will find an obvious and bright star. That's the North Star and – true to its name – if you're looking at it, you're pointing bang-on north.



One of the best places to see stars in the UK is Kielder Forest; just an hour's car journey from Newcastle but with zero light pollution. With a basic telescope you should be able to view the rings of Saturn, although if you want to see what a Martian had for his dinner, head to the Kielder Observatory instead.

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EAT OUT

(LIKE REALLY OUT)



► Unless you've planned a 'bushcraft lunch', running low on food screams of piss-poor preparation. It's very satisfying and impressive to harvest selectively from nature's larder, though. I'd definitely encourage you to do it for a simple and easy way to get a caveman-style 'me man, man beat chest, aaaaaaaghhh' sensation. Which, frankly, we could do with a bit more of in a world of skinny bloody jeans.

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SLEEP JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE

► Kipping under the stars is great until a bunch of angry clouds turn up intent on dousing your high spirits. Protect your extremities with a bivi bag, which is essentially a lightweight, waterproof sleeping bag. It'll stop light rain, the morning dew or even snow from spoiling a good night's sleep. One up from this is a basha. That's an Army term for a shelter made from a piece of tarpaulin. There are infinite ways to construct one, but the simplest is to string a cord between two trees and lay a rectangular tarp over the cord. Pin the ends to the ground and you've got a tent. Make sure the open ends aren't pointing into the wind and the lower the construction, the more sheltered you'll be.



Almost anything on the seashore

In a survival situation, head to the beach for a wealth of food including limpets, mussels and whelks. Seaweed is another good one – there is only one species in Britain that's poisonous and it grows at least 35ft underwater, so anything in rock pools is good to go.



Nettles

Everyone can identify them and they're abundant across the country. Boil fresh young leaves (avoid older ones, which can be risky) in water to make nettle tea, add them to soup or hold them briefly over a flame to wilt them, which burns off the tiny hairs that sting you. They taste like spinach.



Wild fish

Get a speargun, learn how to use it safely and catch your dinner. It's the most sustainable way to fish. You select the size and species and there is no rubbish left when you depart. It also means you'll spend time getting an appreciation for the amazing underwater world.

07 GO GREEN (IN A 4x4)

► Green lanes, or BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic), are old trackways that are legally accessible to motorised vehicles. The snag is that your flash two-seater soft-top will be bugged-all use on these crater-strewn, mud-soaked routes. This is proper off-road 4x4 territory – I use my Santa Fe [Andy is

a brand ambassador for Hyundai, a cushy deal which basically means he gets a free top-of-the-range motor and they facilitate many of his adventures. One phone call today and they've set up a campsite for us and put on some hot apple crumble cooked over a fire – like we said, cushy].

Simply go to a website such as bywaymap.com to view the tracks in your local area and then let it rip. There is something instinctive and re-affirming manly about throwing a steering wheel – wagon slewing side to side – as you throttle-on with the vehicle through some dusty track in the middle of nowhere.



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EXPLORE THE COAST

► One of the finest destinations for adventure in the UK, as an island nation, is our coastline. Most of it is off limits due to remoteness, distance from roads or paths or high cliffs. But not so with a sea kayak. They are the perfect way to investigate secret bays and get up close to amazing wildlife including seabird colonies, seals, basking sharks and even whales... all right here on our doorstep.

Closed-cockpit kayaks are best used after a little coaching but Sit-On-Top (SOT) kayaks can be hired for the day with no formal training. There are plenty of rental companies that can also advise on locations and conditions to suit your experience. All you need to do then is load it up with gear, including camping stuff, and set off.

There is nothing better than pulling up into a beautiful cove with cliffs creating an impenetrable amphitheatre that cuts off access to all but the seafarer, lighting a campfire on the beach and having a wee snifter as the sun sets over the sea. Any woman who doesn't rank this as the best date ever is clearly as mad as a bag of frogs and you should run away.



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DRINK WITH MOTHER NATURE

► Hydration is key in the field. When you're subjecting yourself to mental and physical pressure there is no need to add to the physiological stress by being dehydrated. Drinking from natural sources is either great or deadly depending on where you are in the world. In the UK our water is relatively clean but get as close to the source as possible to minimise the contamination potential. A spring or mountain stream is best as there is little 'up-current' to have affected it. Go for running water over stagnant.

It's impossible to know for certain that it's safe but common sense can be applied. Think about what it's passed by and through beforehand – farms, camp sites, mining operations, a dead sheep or two.

Of course you can just invest in a filter. I have a sports bottle with one built in. Fill it up anywhere and drink as normal. I also use it on holiday in places where the hotel water is undrinkable – it saves me buying mineral water.

People (like, of course, *FHM*) often ask, "Can you drink your own urine?" To which I reply, "Yes. But only recreationally." If you're that hot and thirsty it's likely to be like treacle anyway and there is more survival advantage to pouring it over your head to help lower your core temperature.



SEE IT, CLIMB IT

► I could wax lyrical for days on end about how great climbing is... the sense of exploration, of freedom, of conquering sheer walls of rock. But put simply, it's a whole load of fun and gets you ripped at the same time. We're talking biceps of iron, forearms like a Tudor blacksmith and a grip to crush the hand of Chuck Norris. Well, maybe not Chuck Norris, but Superman for definite.

Most people start climbing at an indoor wall but if you want to head outside for the real thing there are plenty of good instructors and guides who can set you on the right path. The UK is full of outstanding rocks and even in the relatively flat South East of England you're only a couple of hours from climbing great places such as the Peak District or the Jurassic Coast.



My favourite climb is the Old Man of Hoy, a 500ft rock pillar off the coast of Orkney. I did it with my friend Leo Houlding, one of the UK's top climbers, and the mountaineering legend that is Sir Chris Bonington. We were there to celebrate Chris's 80th, so you can't use age as an excuse.