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HARDEN UP!

It's time to get in shape for your best summer yet - it's time to head to boot camp **P2**

Step up to new level of fitness

If you want to get in shape, then give boot camp a go... you'll be amazed by the results, writes **Dominic Burke**

IT'S Saturday morning and you're standing at the bottom of the Kangaroo Point cliffs, in front of an impossibly steep set of stairs.

You should be back home in bed, enjoying a much-deserved weekend lie-in, but you find yourself staring up a pain-inducing path that supposedly leads to weight loss, increased fitness and a better "butt".

Incredibly, you're not alone.

"Kangaroo Point stairs on a Saturday morning - it's packed," seasoned stairmaster Rachael Low reveals. "There are groups everywhere... it's very popular."

This is in no small part thanks to boot camps, coming to a park (or outdoor staircase) near you. Don't worry, it's not all climbing stairs.

As personal trainer Kate Beeley says when describing the boot camps she runs through MissFit: "We're running, we're doing stairs, we're doing body-weighted exercises - dips, lunges, push-ups, squats, step-ups and squat jumps and all that kind of jazz."

Boot camps are mostly group training sessions - normally outdoors - and often come in six, eight or 12-week packages. There are weekend boot camps, themed boot camps - take your pick.

You can find yourself in a park doing a range of exercise from burpees (oh, the pain!) and kettlebells to skipping, jogging and boxing.

Many boot camps include regular weigh-ins and offer nutritional advice.

Sally Symonds, weight loss expert and author of *50 Steps to Lose 50kg... and Keep It Off*, says boot camps "are becoming more and more popular".

"And one of the reasons is they are a more affordable alternative to personal training," Symonds says.

"You get a more intensive workout than you probably would get in a group fitness class, such as a step class, because in a group fitness class there's a lot more people - 20 or 30 people - so the instructor can't go around and push you really hard.

"But in a boot camp you probably get about 12 people per one instructor if it's a well-run boot camp, so therefore they are going to push you.

"It's more affordable and it can also be more time-efficient because you're getting a better workout.

"There's the camaraderie factor as well, because a lot of times it's quite social and people

go out afterwards and have social events attached to it."

Low has completed five boot camps through MissFit, and keeps coming back.

"I find that because it's in a six-week block, there's a lot of motivation," she says.

"There's an end, there's a result, so you can really see results quite quickly. It's a good way to accelerate your training, accelerate your fitness, get your diet back on track.

"There's usually 100 per cent attendance the whole six weeks, which is quite amazing to see. Everyone puts everything on hold and they turn up to all the sessions. It's really good for motivation.

"I find working with the group keeps you motivated. There are different fitness levels within it. Just to see your beginning fitness and your fitness at the end, it's quite amazing to see what you achieve in such a short time."

Chris Tuck runs group fitness sessions for women at New Farm Park. Two things stand out for him when he assesses why people embrace boot camps.

"Working with the group keeps you motivated... Just to see your beginning fitness and your fitness at the end, it's quite amazing to see what you achieve in such a short time"

Rachael Low

"Definitely the outdoor aspect - a lot of people prefer that," Tuck says. "They've had experiences with gyms and it hasn't really worked out for them, they like getting out in the outdoors. But also the group aspect is quite motivating. It really helps them to stick at it."

And if you're turned off by the thought of a trainer in the guise of an army drill sergeant, stress not.

"It doesn't necessarily have to be like that," Symonds says. "It can be, and the thing is if you don't want that, then pick another boot camp because there's a lot of them around.

"Some people want people to yell in their face, some people need that. But other people don't. So if you think you're going to crumble, there's a thousand boot camps around."

Anne Ryan found her way down to Tuck at New Farm and says the Supreme Fitness instructor is "not like an army sergeant".

She still goes to the gym but is enjoying the fun of Tuck's sessions.

"After a couple of times a week you feel you've really done some good things for your body," she says. "And not only your body, I also do it for my mental health and to maintain stress levels at a low.

"I think it is good to encourage people to get out there and do things that are healthy and that are local. You can meet some other people from your local community."

Function Well's Matt Ham has been in the fitness industry for eight years and has seen his share of "fads". He says boot camps, however, have endured - "and why not?"

"At this time of year it's the perfect temperature," he says. "It's great to be outside and we've got some good places around that are very popular - Kangaroo Point, New Farm Park, places which are quite picturesque."

So what about a tip from a seasoned pro to a prospective boot camper struggling with the concept of ignoring the snooze button on a sluggish Saturday morning?

"Just harden up," Ham says, before breaking into a laugh. "There's no real secret to it, it's more a habitual thing. If you do it for 21 days, you create a habit, but I've done it for seven or eight years now and it's still very tough, especially during winter.

"People who get up early in the morning and have that routine are more likely to meet their fitness goals. At the end of the day it's all about discipline."

Back to those Kangaroo Point stairs. Beeley insists they'll help you get a "firm rear end".

And while tough, they can be "very rewarding", according to Low.

"The first time I did it I thought 'what am I doing, this is insane'. You look at the steepness of the stairs and you're running up and down and your legs are killing you," Low says.

"But you get through it and you just feel amazing. The first one's always the worst. Once you get over that you're OK. And it's in such a spectacular spot, you're right on the river, you've got the breeze, there's people all around you doing exactly the same thing, everyone feels your pain. It's like a group connection."

So, summer's just around the corner. Who's ready to take the first step?



GROUP MOTIVATION: Chris Tuck (main picture and right), of Supreme Fitness Personal Training, puts women through their paces in boot camp sessions at New Farm Park. Pictures: Bruce Long

It's simple to be prepared

BOOT camp preparation can be as simple as turning up, ready to train.

As most boot camps supply their own equipment, the biggest thing you need to worry about is what to wear.

"Really good, supportable and comfortable runners is probably the most important thing," says Kent Pumpa, owner-director of Boot Camps Australia.

"For females, making sure they wear a good sports bra and comfy training gear is vital.

"A towel and a water bottle is also important, and wearing a hat and being sun-smart."

Eating before training can prove problematic for some, but Pumpa says it's up to the individual.

"Everyone's different. If I train first thing in the morning, I never eat before I train but some people have to. It just depends on their metabolism," he says.

"Just make sure if you're training that you don't eat too much - some fruit, pears or apples are good.

"In the afternoon, eat two hours before you train."

Water is vital. "Make sure you hydrate. In the lead-up, hydrating yourself is really important, rather than just drinking when you train."

Weight-loss expert Sally Symonds has an extensive list of tips on how to choose a boot

- camp that's right for you. These include:
- Ensure your PT is qualified
 - Ensure your PT is experienced
 - Shop around
 - Ask for a free trial session
 - Check that your schedules fit
 - Ask about results from previous clients

Find a boot camp to suit

- Boot Camps Australia, bootcampsaustralia.com
- MissFit PT, missfitpt.com.au
- Supreme Fitness Personal Training, newfarmpersonaltraining.com.au
- Function Well, functionwell.com.au

New-look CM2

WITH its bright new look today your CM2 is set to deliver you even more features and information on gardening, boating, fishing, surfing and the great outdoors.

We'll still be letting you know about the best events to take you from Friday through the weekend in our comprehensive What's On guide.

And if you're already missing Alison Cotes' Eats review, David Costello's Fossicking and Rory Gibson's Drink Beer columns, don't despair, as you'll find them in tomorrow's new LIFE lift-out, part of the exciting relaunch of *The Courier-Mail's* Saturday edition.

And from next week, CM2 will have a new editor - Mark Voisey.

