

# FIRST LADY



Now that lockdown restrictions are easing, there's no better time to re-engage with the outdoors, our loved ones and our favourite pastime, says Club President **Julia Bradbury**

**To say** it's a topsy-turvy world is an understatement at the moment, but it feels as if we're finally able to enjoy the gorgeous scenery of the UK again, and to spend some all-important time with our loved ones.

As you read this hopefully the remaining Covid restrictions in England have been lifted (21 June) and thank goodness for the reliability and steadfastness of National Camping and Caravanning Week (NCCW), which turned 21 this year.

With campsites open once again up and down the country, it feels good to have some prolonged outdoor activity to look forward to. After writing this column, I'll be packing bags - including my Club President bling (which will be travelling separately under armed guard) for me and my three little ones, and joining the Club team at the Drayton Manor Club Site for a week.

By the time you read these words, NCCW will be done and dusted for another year, but you can watch all the activities that we got up to with other campers during the week on the Club's Facebook page at [facebook.com/thefriendlyclub](https://facebook.com/thefriendlyclub).

Drayton Manor is the ideal site for the family because it's got so much to do on and offsite, with a theme park just next door. Your kids won't have a chance to ask about screen time because they'll be too busy - during NCCW we've got plans for me and my kids to have a go at archery, knock it for six in some non-competitive family rounders and go on camping treasure hunts.

Amazing chef and Club presenter Andrew Dickens and I always have fun cooking up tasty camping nosh, and his top barbecue tips will help you deliver delicious grub to all those hungry mouths (I don't know about you, but being outside always makes me hungrier).

Watch out for my video showing you how to plan the perfect family walk, and if you know me, you'll know I'm a bit of tree hugger. I'm not completely bonkers though - there's a name for it in Japan, *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing) - and a growing body of evidence suggests that green spaces and being around trees in particular can reduce your stress, enhance your mood, improve your concentration and even boost your immune system. More than half of UK adults say that being close to nature improves their mental health, and four in ten say it makes them feel less worried or anxious, which makes camping the perfect pastime to help ease those mental health worries.

We've done some pretty awesome things in the past to celebrate and mark NCCW. I'll never forget camping out in the grounds of Warwick Castle back in 2010, when the



▲ Clockwise from above: Julia suspended above the Thames in a Tentsile tent for NCCW in 2017; camping on top of the O2 Arena in 2016; lighting up the Great Ridge with Sam Thompson in 2018

screaming peacocks woke us all up at 4am. I've camped in a tent on top of the O2 Arena (2016) which is the first time that's been done. We helped light up the Great Ridge in the Peak District with headtorches at night, and I managed to persuade Sam Thompson from Made in Chelsea to camp out under canvas (2018). Plus, of course, Christopher Biggins, Eamonn Holmes and Jenni Falconer joined the party when we set up a floating caravan site on the Thames at Tower Bridge in London (2019). If anyone tells you camping is boring - they're lying!

I've already touched on the power of nature and you might have seen that it was Mental Health Awareness Week in May. I saw loads of people on social media who were helping to raise awareness and funds by going on various charity walks and bike rides - it's such an important topic. The last 12 months have been tough for all of us, piling pressure on our physical and mental health. We know how powerful nature can be, so finding the time to get back outdoors now we're allowed, is more important than ever and that goes hand in hand with camping. Planning a camping break to the seaside or countryside, striding out and enjoying a spot of forest bathing, cosying into your sleeping bag at sundown and waking to the dawn chorus overhead - it's the perfect recipe for creating positive emotions and feelings.

If you're anything like me, you'll be very excited by the opportunity for human contact, spending time with loved ones and making memories. Now's the time to discover camping again, and to feel free. 🏕️