

Watch out Robin Hood, Laura Smith's in town...

Our intrepid writer heads to the new home of Explore 4x4 in Elveden and tries her hand at archery and a range of other exciting outdoor activities

FEATURE

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What I knew about archery prior to visiting

Explore 4x4 at its new home in Elveden was based on scenes from films like Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves.

But, as I would soon find out at co-owners Malcolm Swan and Debs Turpin's latest outdoor activities site, there's a lot more to the sport than simply aiming at a target and letting go.

Equipped with armguard, finger tab, bow and arrows, it was time to put into practise the advice of instructor Wayne Marper.

And, though my first arrow landed outside of the target (or, rather, behind it), with some minor adjustments in stance, posture and grip, I was pleased with the way my aim had improved by the end of the session - albeit still a long way off rivaling Robin Hood's reputation and a far cry from the skill demonstrated by others in my group!

Progressing to weapons of the Middle Ages, Paul

Malcolm Swan and Debs Turpin



Warwick then taught us how to fire a crossbow, with a brief history lesson thrown in for good measure.

Cocking, loading and shooting this came easier than expected and, being less physically demanding than the bow and arrow, is

where I finally managed to score a bullseye.

In fact, I've got to say, this is where the girls initially outshone the boys, though the scores seemed to have evened out by the final round.

Air rifles were next up, with Ian Jones tasked with introducing us to the modern weapon and refining our shooting technique.

Breaking the barrel to load pellets was much harder than it looked and is where I needed the most assistance. Aiming at tin cans and metal targets, we familiarised ourselves with the weapons before the final scoring round took place.

My shots worsened as I struggled to balance the time needed to take aim with the time it took my tiring muscles to react to the weight of the gun - if only we had kept score during practice!

Having retrieved our targets, Ian helped work out our tallies

for the day and made a note of them as part of a competition within Explore 4x4 (not something I'm pinning my hopes on winning).

Our time with the

experienced and professional team at Elveden was a lot of fun and offered us something very different for a family day out.

And there was still so much more to do, from 4x4 off-road driving in Brick Kiln Wood to zombie crossbow shooting, sling shots, catapults, knife, spear and axe throwing, military survival training, not to mention clay pigeon shooting and skid pan driving.

"We just love it and we want everyone who arrives to go back home buzzing," said Debs, whose encouraging approach is 'if I can do it, anybody can do it'.

"We want everyone to learn but we want everyone to have fun too - when you enjoy



Laura Smith with a crossbow.



Taking aim with air rifles



Off-road driving



Clay pigeon shooting

something you learn more," she added

Debs, of Sudbury, and Malcolm, of Thetford, have worked together for 13 years and couldn't be happier about their recent partnership with the Elveden Estate, where Explore 4x4 has operated since May.

"We're thrilled and delighted about having moved our activities to Elveden - it's just got the most fantastic facilities and offers us everything we wanted," said Debs.

"We used to work across East Anglia but we couldn't do everything at any one site, here we can and that's

what's so spectacular," added Malcolm.

As well as offering corporate team-building days, activities for stag/hen parties and fun ideas for family days out, Explore 4x4 is also an accredited training company, offering a wide range of courses - 4x4 off road, ATV, winch and trailer training, shotgun skills, first aid and health and safety - enabling companies to comply with legislation.

It can host events and training courses easily within Elveden's large and picturesque 22,500 acres, with qualified instructors who are all ex, or serving, military or police.

"We offer anything from one hour's archery for one person to opportunities for several hundred people and I think we provide pretty good value for money," said Debs. "And we like to think we give a really great personal service."

"Whatever we do is individual," added Malcolm. "We're happy to put something together and if there's something we haven't got, we probably know somebody who can do it."

The pair have big plans for their new home with Debs particularly keen to expand the corporate side of the business, incorporating the facilities available to them

now - and, with Christmas around the corner, what better place for a company day out?

Specialist catering for large events is provided by The Movable Feast while other visitors can dine at the Courtyard Restaurant or Elveden Inn.

"We certainly won't be standing still - we're constantly looking to bring things in," said Debs.

Explore 4x4 operates seven days a week, but booking is essential.

Email enquiries@explore-4x4.co.uk or call 01787 320640 or 07766 223884.

For more details, visit www.explore-4x4.co.uk