

Rhalou (front row, second left in black capris), spending time with like-minded runners

running diary

'ROBOTS NEED LOVE, TOO!'

IN HER MISSION TO BECOME A WELL-OILED RUNNING MACHINE, ONLINE EDITOR **RHALOU** STUMBLES ACROSS HER SPIRITUAL HOME

Having recently upped my training to badass proportions, I've never been more acutely aware of my body. I feel like I've developed a close, intimate relationship with every single follicle, muscle and ligament under my skin. If I don't obey my muscles' every whim, they let me know about it very quickly. The slightest mishap in the diet department or one too many cocktails can have a surprising effect on my entire routine, and training becomes arduous and painful. But when everything's in fully functioning order, thanks to some serious hill running and a shed load of interval-training sessions, my usual slog around the park is a breeze and I'm turning into a well-oiled machine.

But training like a bat out of hell is not without its drawbacks. And I don't just mean injury; I'm talking about turning into a social retard. If you spend your whole damn time in the

gym/park/pool training like a robot, it leaves little or no time to hang out with your mates. It didn't take me long to realise that, unless I combined my exercise routine with my social life, if I was going to train properly for the ING New York City Marathon, I would be spending the summer alone.

CLUB TOGETHER

At *Women's Running* HQ, we have always championed running with friends, but due to the sheer frequency of my new training regime, I was struggling to find anyone mad enough to join me on my crazy running journey. I had always toyed with the idea of joining a running club, but based on my inability to pay my gas bill on time, much less manage a gym membership, the concept of joining a club didn't appeal. But then I met the Run Dem Crew (RDC) and everything changed.

A collective of people of all ages, RDC (www.rundemcrew.com) run together every Tuesday – but they're much more than just runners. Founded by Charlie Dark, teacher, poet, mentor, social entrepreneur and running guru, as well as exploring the beautiful city of London together once a week, the RDC gets together for workshops, films and talks, and they support each other through races. They even have a younger crew, where they mentor kids between the ages of 17 and 21, teaching them the joys of running.

ONE OF THE CREW

It's been great to meet a crew of like-minded people, who are all just as nuts about running as I am while still being up for having a good time, that I feel like I've found my spiritual home. I've seen more of London in a month than I'd seen in the five years since I moved here, and five miles goes by in a flash when you're surrounded by interesting people.

Not only have I made some great new friends, but hanging out with like-minded runners provides a whole new level of much-needed support. The chaps at The Centre For Health & Human Performance (CHHP) have been amazing and regularly check up on me, but making friends with other runners has provided invaluable support. My Twitter account has been buzzing away at all times of the day with kind, funny, silly and heart-warming messages from my fellow runners.

I've also been introduced to the joys of hill running by a few particularly badass members of RDC. Despite the extreme pain (hill running hurts like hell!) the rewards are plentiful and since discovering the benefits of vertical running, my training has come on leaps and bounds.

If you're struggling with motivation or tired of running alone, I implore you to join a running club. The journey of a long-distance runner needn't be a lonely one – and robots need love, too! 🐼

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