

GL-ASSTONBURY Sun writer bares all as she goes uncovered at the UK's biggest naturist festival

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ITâ€™S a balmy summerâ€™s day and I am just feet away from the naked posterior of a man in his late sixties. Perched on the end of my yoga mat, I inhale deeply as we follow instructions to roll down our spines.

As I bend over, my eyes meet his cheeks just as they part. â€œI am a serious investigative journalist, I am a serious investigative journalistâ€•, I repeat in my head as we adopt the pose.

Amy Nickell, right, bares all as she heads to the UK's biggest naturist festival

Amy slips into a harness as she prepares to rock climb completely nude

I am naked in front of a room of strangers. What must the person on the mat behind me be seeing of my nether regions? This is the stuff of nightmares for many, but for naturists, the ultimate summer getaway.

Welcome to the 13th annual NudeFest, the â€œGlastonbury of the naturist calendarâ€•, where 500 naturists descend on Somerset for a week-long celebration of nakedness.

And this year Iâ€™ve somehow ended up being a punter. No age limit, families welcome â€œ clothes optional.

First rule of Nudefest, donâ€™t say â€œnudistâ€•, the correct term is â€œnaturistâ€•. Second rule, keep your gaze at eye level.

Third, donâ€™t get any funny ideas â€œ this Â£44-a-night experience is a family show.

WEIRD YET THRILLING

Being naked doesnâ€™t sit easy with me. I didnâ€™t grow up in a â€œnaked householdâ€• and the last adult human to see me in the altogether was my waxer, before that my gynaecologist.

When I arrive it has just started to rain, so rather anti-climatically there are a lot more clothes than I had prepared myself for.

I meet my mentor, Pam, a 27-year-old heading up the youth contingent of British Naturism, and she says I can undress in her tent. She doesnâ€™t even buy me a drink first.

I slip off everything and cover myself with a towel. I meet two boys about my age and am starkly aware I will later see their genitals.

This is weird, but slightly thrillingâ€•.â€•.â€•.â€•I think how much I donâ€™t want them to see my bum. Pants off, we head over to the main area and straight to the bar for Dutch courage.

I know it's time to drop the towel, I didn't drive three hours to Somerset to bottle it now. And so, in front of a class of naked adults learning how to make balloon animals, I bare all.

Suddenly, I am Keith Chegwin in Naked Jungle. In a bid to distract myself, I join in the balloon session and resist the searing urge to make a quip about the sausage-shaped balloons.

A few hours in and, despite Â-fearing it may be against naturist etiquette, I question the obvious trend for a fuzz-free look down below. One man deadpans: "I've got a smaller penis so trim the hairs so they don't get stuck".

I meet Graham, 70, at the bar. After losing his wife five years ago he has immersed himself in the scene. He even drives naked "pay-at-the-pump has been a blessing.

Graham likes to walk outdoors naked. If I was walking my dog and saw a very naked Graham walking towards me, I would probably call the police.

THE DAY WOBBLES ON

When I tell him this, he reveals he has started to carry a dog lead, despite not owning a dog, to show he comes in peace and to avoid any confusion.

But this is the crux of where naturism is misunderstood "your bits might be out, but there is nothing overwhelmingly sexual about it. I have had smear tests that were more arousing, I think, during Pilates.

Mark, a university lecturer by day who took the pictures for this article, sums it up perfectly when he tells me: "Naturism is about the freedom to choose, and whether you choose clothes or a burqa, it's about being true to you."

The Pilates instructor later says she thought I was a seasoned naturist. I feel a swell of pride, before flashbacks to the downward dog when I almost concussed myself with my own boobs. Downwards dog ears, perhaps a more accurate description.

The staff on site are not naturists, so does the clay pigeon instructor feel left out? It's a strong no. But a "twinkle in his eye hints he is curious "though maybe it was because I was resting my bosom on his gun.

At the rock-climbing, I slip into the harness. It serves as a sort of spreading vice and I almost certainly give an involuntary gynaecological showcase to those queuing at the bottom.

I question a health and safety system that says no bare feet but gusset optional. Things reach critical levels of surreal when we spy a chap wearing nothing but a Robin Hood cap teaching archery. Along with Pam, I join in.

When I ask some younger naturists if anything ever happens after nightfall, a 25-year-old man, who is yet to tell his family about his hobby, says: "Most people take their clothes off when they're drunk, I put them on."

Then I drop my first clanger, telling Sian, a NudeFest volunteer: "I don't know why people have a problem with it. It's not like you're all a bunch of swingers."

I suddenly feel naked in the middle of a party and realise I am. I ask a man called Paul, who has an impressive body painting of a lion on his belly, why he didn't go a bit lower and get an elephant.

THE DAY WOBBLES ON

My joke falls flat (clanger No2). Could it be that naturists are discretely quite prudish? I feel a little flutter when a good-looking, strawberry blond man walks by with the most gorgeous bum.

Yes, I do fancy him. And yes, more because I can see everything. Is all this nakedness truly totally devoid of sexuality â€” and if naturism is not about objectifying certain body parts, how do you explain a TV show like Naked Attraction?

Pam tells me: â€œThere is an inverse insecurity of watching a show like that â€” it just shows how obsessed we are with bodies and comparison.â€• I spot a uniformed police officer doing the rounds and canâ€™t help but think how overdressed he looks.

It becomes clear that naturists donâ€™t care two hoots what anyone else thinks of them. For this, I start to appreciate them even more.

A volunteer in his 50s tells me: â€œPeople who ridicule us donâ€™t have the guts. All my friends and family admire me for being able to do this.â€•

But thatâ€™s the point that mentor Pam makes so brilliantly â€” we arenâ€™t a sum of our body parts. And thatâ€™s what true naturism is all about.

She says: â€œIf youâ€™ve got a s**t personality youâ€™ll stand out â€” because here you have nothing to hide behind.â€•

I begin to envy her true-self acceptance and body confidence. I definitely hate my bum more as the day wobbles on, instead of feeling less self-conscious about it. At the end of the day, I put on my knickers, thank Pam and say Iâ€™ll message her when I get home.

Itâ€™s like the end of a one-night stand. I hope she messages me. For the patrons of Nudefest, it is good, clean, wholesome fun celebrating people for who they are not what they look like.

I want to say I felt liberated. But I didnâ€™t, just wobbly. However I did feel totally respected.

Pamâ€™s openness and frankness is refreshing, and while Iâ€™m still scratching to get beneath the surface of my own body issues, I would love nothing more than a drink in the pub with this lot.

I go home with no washing and no tan lines and wonder, could I get used to this?

Amy bared all as she took aim at some clay pigeons

Robin good â€” Amy speaks with with a seasoned archer and naturist

500 naturists descend on Somerset for a week-long celebration annually

Festival-goers come together to put up the annual Nudfest sign

No small talk – Amy chats with naturist mentor Pam

A festival goer jumps in celebration

There is no age limit at the festival, and clothes are entirely optional

Cheeky – a couple enjoy the hot weather at the festival

The festival is known by many as the 'Glastonbury of the naturist calendar'

- The Sun