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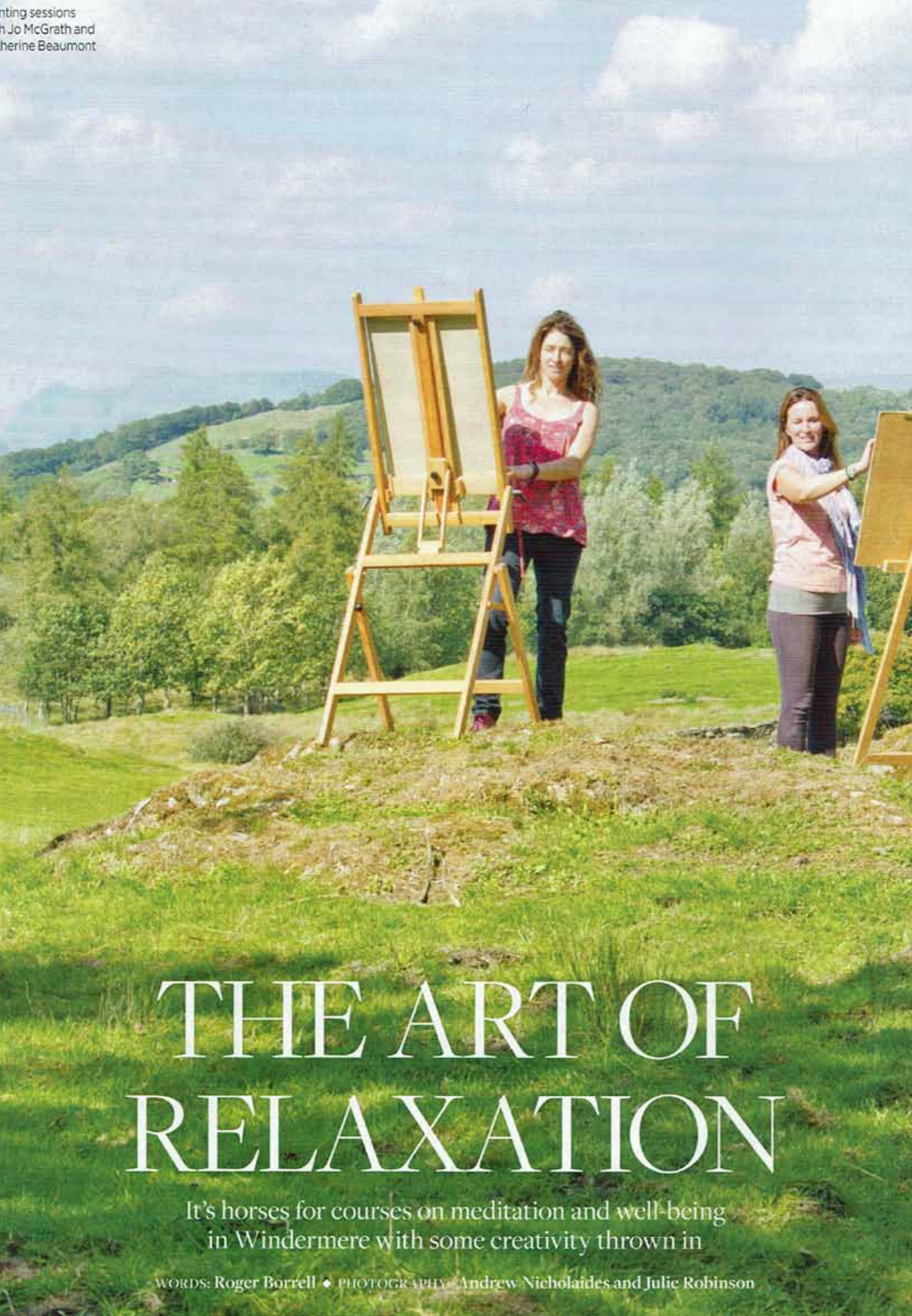
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Full Circle Retreat, Windermere, by Andrew Nicholaides



THE ART OF RELAXATION

It's horses for courses on meditation and well-being
in Windermere with some creativity thrown in

WORDS: Roger Borrell ♦ PHOTOGRAPHY: Andrew Nicholaidis and Julie Robinson

When Debbie Henderson and her partner decided they wanted to live in the countryside, they agreed a smallholding would be ideal. What they ended up with was a stunning 180-acre farm just outside Windermere.

While John was happy to rear rare breeds of sheep and cattle, Debbie had a yearning to share this idyllic piece of land with people who would not only appreciate it but benefit from the experience. And that is what she is doing from the end of this month.

Debbie, a Lancashire lass who grew up near Bolton, was in Edinburgh learning the skills of teaching horse riding and stable management when her parents decided to up sticks and move to the Lake District.

'Their decision led me to reappraise what I wanted to do with my life,' says Debbie. 'It was then that I discovered the Lake District was really where my heart was.'

That was back in the 1980s and in the intervening years she pursued a successful career in retailing and as a buyer in the interior design industry. Then, ten years ago, she met John.

'We talked about what we wanted to do together and he said he wanted a smallholding. That suited me fine because I'm a country girl at heart,' says Debbie.

They ended up with the rather more substantial Whasdyke Farm where Debbie decided to use her expertise to set up Hands On Heavy Horses offering visitors not



ABOVE: Debbie meditating with Otto, one of her Clydesdales

BELOW: Debbie, Katherine and Ashley foraging for floral items

FAR RIGHT: Each day starts with yoga

just the chance to ride beautiful Clydesdales but also experience looking after these gentle giants.

Then she heard about Katherine Beaumont, who featured in Lancashire Life last year offering meditation and yoga using horses. They met up and agreed to work together forming Full Circle Retreats.

Katherine uses meditation techniques with her horses to remarkable effect. These animals appear to drift off into a trance-like sleep, emitting a strong aura of well-being and calm.

'I was blown away by what she was doing – it was absolutely fascinating,' says Debbie. 'I've worked with horses all my life but I've never experienced anything like it and, I suspect, many others will be the same. Good grief, it was just too good not to share!'

The two women decided to work together and combine the meditation with other relaxation activities several of which can be done around horses. For

instance, the people who go there on courses can experience yoga and then spend time learning a wide range of skills – painting with artist Jo McGrath from Yew Tree Farm, floristry with Kendal's Ashley Holden, photography with Rachel Hayton and writing skills with Carnforth author Zoe Dawes. There will also be foraging and pottery. The non-residential two day courses will be monthly from spring to the autumn and cost £295.

'Full Circle is aimed at providing a space, beyond the fast pace of life, to re-establish your sense of wholeness,' says Debbie. 'The landscape, the horses, the farm, together with a carefully constructed schedule

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of yoga, horse meditation practice, nutrition, and creative workshops, combines perfectly with our ethos to create a sanctuary where full living takes place.

'As well as catering for experienced meditators these retreats are designed to introduce beginners into the benefits of meditation so they take those skills away and use them on a daily basis, like a tool kit for life.

'We have found that being absorbed in nature, by taking part in therapeutic activities, with an intention set for self-care and exploration, helps you find your inner playfulness and creativity.

'I want people to come away totally relaxed having been pampered and to feel as if they've been able to dip into a pool of fun, playfulness and creativity that they might not have experienced since childhood.' ♦

For more information go to www.fullcircleretreats.co.uk



Photo: Julie Robinson

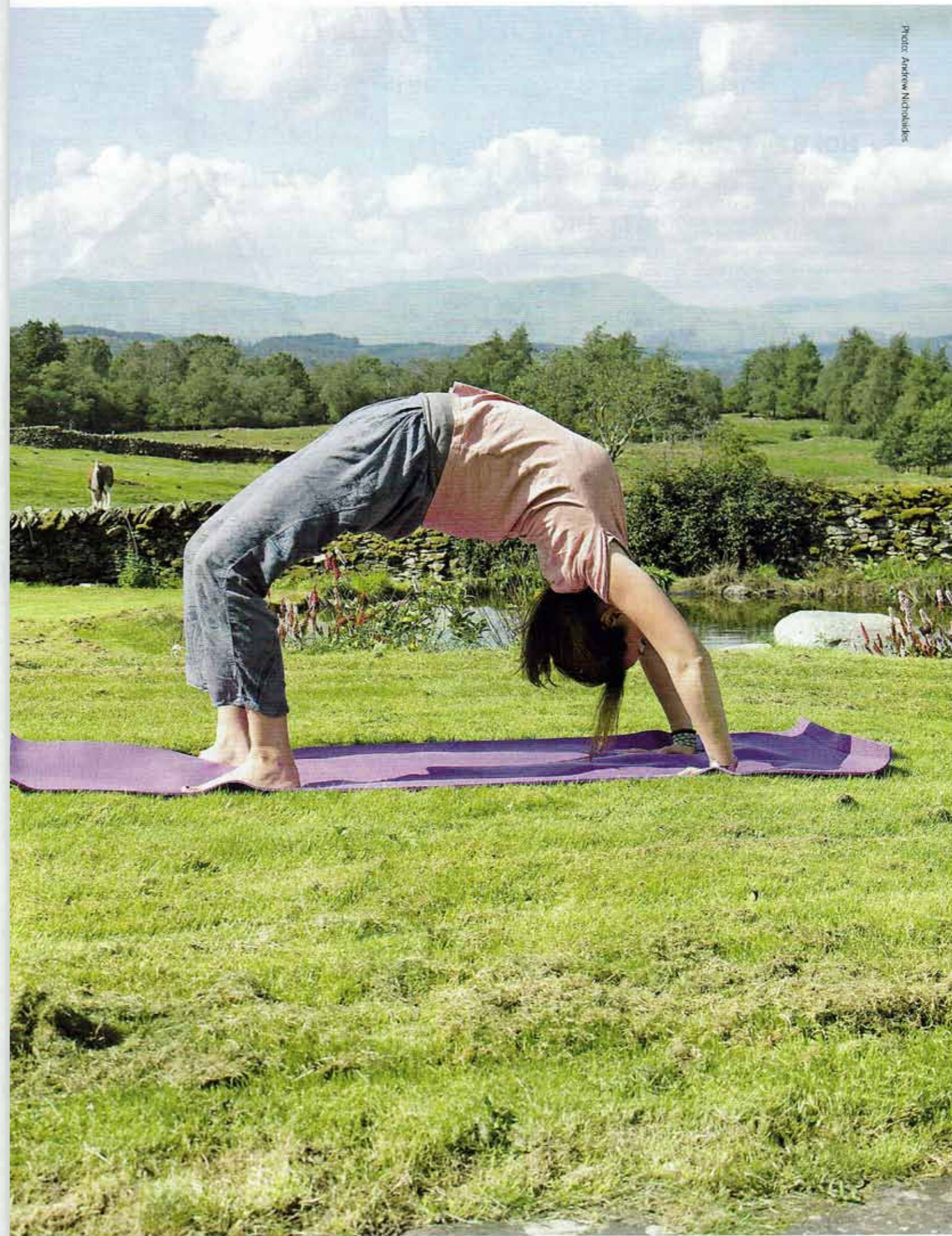


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