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**OUTDOORS**

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W e outdoors people tend to train by leaping through the pages of **OUT THERE**, hanging around outdoors stores hunting for bargains, or — if we've got a really big walking trip coming up — by humping a heavy pack down to the Blue Gum Forest or up to the summit of Mt Barney. There is another way, and you can do it (or at least some of it) while flat on your back. Sound too good to be true? Well, the truth of yoga is even better than that. Far from being a harsh discipline for people with the suppleness of rubber dolls, yoga offers instant rewards for everyone, especially those suffering from premature rigor mortis.

Flexibility, or the lack of it, is not the point. Yoga is the conscious unhooking of the mind from day-to-day thoughts by focusing on the internal environment of breath, body and emotion. A sense of well-being and inner poise emerges, which allows you to feel more at ease with your surroundings. This is achieved with the most simple poses as much as with the complex and contorted ones.

Most of us who venture outdoors do so to relieve ourselves of the pressures of daily life, and so yoga is a logical adjunct to outdoor activities — not only do both share the goals of calming your mind and energising your body, they also help you to live in the present moment. Performing yoga in the outdoors is a great blend of both worlds, and also offers the appealing benefit of dealing with those on-the-trail pains which come from long descents or lugging heavy packs.

## YOGA POSTURES OR ASANAS

On a physical level, yoga increases flexibility, stamina and endurance. Yoga strengthens the muscles of the body by increasing their elasticity. By extension and contraction, the blood is pumped through the muscles, thus enhancing nutrition to the muscle groups and assisting in the elimination of by-products such as lactic acid. Stress injuries are often caused when imbalances in muscle length create uneven pressure across joint surfaces. Regular yoga practice brings balance to the opposing muscle groups.

We have selected the following poses because they are suitable to perform in the field. However, this does not mean that these simple asanas (postures) shouldn't be done at home because they have immediate benefits, whether practised before, during or after a trip into the bush. The greatest benefits come with daily practice.

The standing poses of Uttanasana, Gomukasana, and Utkatasana require enough flat, level ground for you to be able to stand with your feet hip-width apart; Gomukasana can also be done in a tent kneeling or sitting on your heels. Supta Pasasana needs level ground for you to lie on, and preferably a closed-cell foam sleeping mat. Virasana One requires enough flat ground for you to kneel on with your arms extended forward.

BY LULU BULL AND ALAN GOODE

## NECK AND SHOULDERS (stiffness or pain)

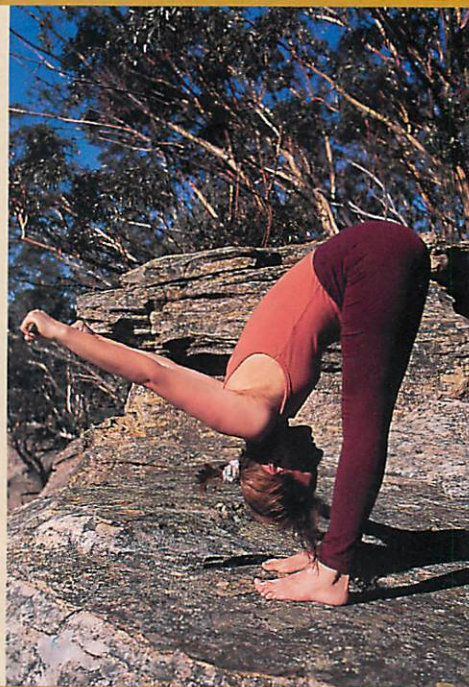
*These parts of the body can be put under considerable strain by climbers heaving their bodies upwards, walkers toting heavy packs, paddlers in both calm and whitewater, cyclists hunching over and pulling on their handlebars, and by skiers poling hard (particularly those carrying packs). These two simple poses offer relief.*

### Uttanasana

(with a stick, tent pole or ski stock)

1. Stand with feet hip-width apart. Hold a pole or stick behind the back with palms facing upwards.
2. Bend forward and raise the pole up and over as far as you can go. Do not bend knees. Stay 20 to 30 seconds and come up. Repeat once.

Benefits: This pose opens the chest, releases tension from the muscles of the arms, shoulders and neck, and stretches the hamstring muscles at the back of the legs.



### Gomukasana

(hands and arms only, or with stick, towel, etc.)

1. Stand with legs together or sit between heels, stretch up left arm, turn it so the palm faces back, then bend the elbow and catch the right hand behind your back between your shoulder blades. Clasp the hands.
2. Take right shoulder tip back and point left elbow towards the vertical. Keep the chest level. Hold for 30 to 60 seconds. Perform on both sides twice.

Hints: If hands do not reach, hold stick, pole, rope, or towel in top hand and clasp with bottom hand.

Benefits: The chest is well expanded and the tension in and around the shoulder girdle is released. The shoulder joints move freely and the latissimus dorsi are fully extended; the spine becomes erect.





## BACK ACHE

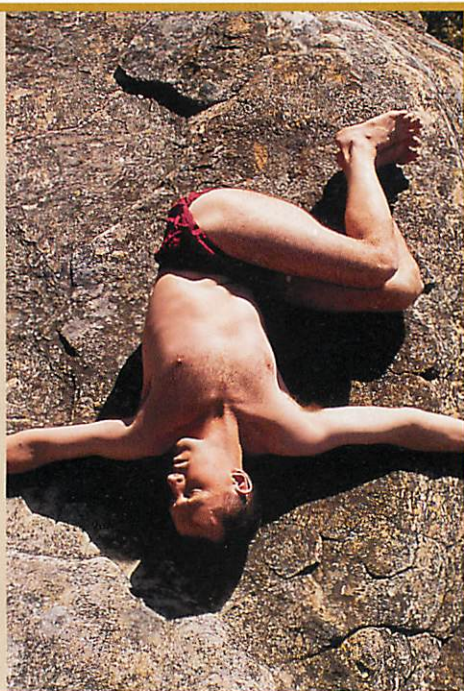
Cyclists, climbers, kayakers and people carrying heavy packs are often subject to back pain. *Supta Pasasana* and *Virasana One* are two poses which will alleviate these problems.

### Supta Pasasana

Lie on your back. Bring your knees to your chest and then lower them to the right on to the floor or ground. Turn your head to the left. Hold 1 to 2 minutes and repeat on the other side. Repeat sequence once.

Hints: Use roll of sleeping bag, towel, small pack under knees if strain is felt in back.

Benefits: This gentle twist to the spine, waist and muscles of the rib cage relieves fatigue in the back muscles.



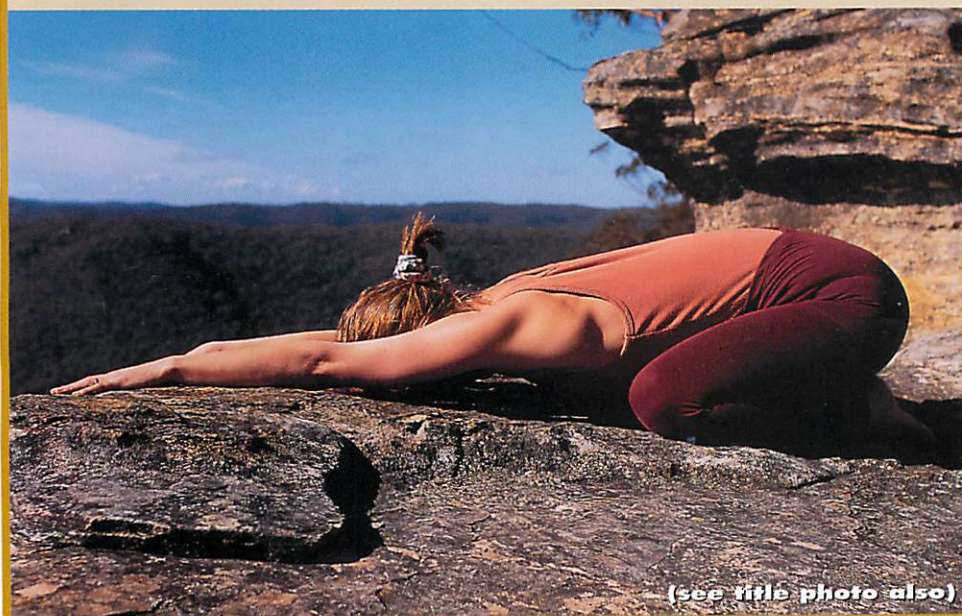
### Virasana One (forward bend)

(With the option of a rolled mat or towel on thighs)

Sit between your legs on the heels. If your buttocks do not rest easily, place a folded blanket, sleeping bag, towel on your heels. Spread your knees slightly apart. Extend the abdomen forwards, and reach your arms forwards along the ground. Stay for 30 to 60 seconds. Repeat once.

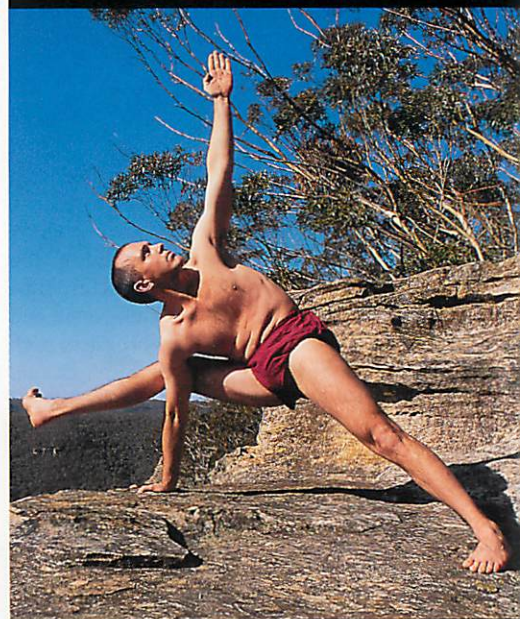
Hint: For greater relief in the sacral region (base of spine) use a rolled mat, towel or folded blanket on thighs. Place the roll on your thighs, and tuck into groin. Extend the abdomen over it, and reach your arms forwards along the ground. Stay for 30 to 60 seconds. Repeat once.

Benefits: Stretches the back muscles. The lumbar spine is extended and the sacral area is broadened (particularly by the variation with towel).

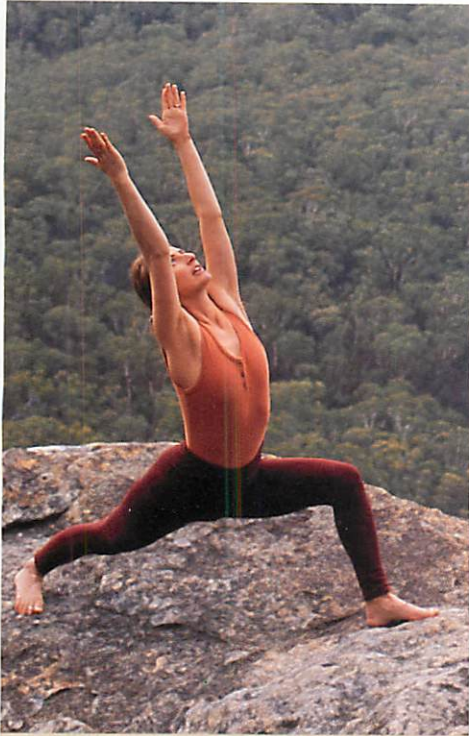


(see title photo also)

**Simple poses offer the same rewards as advanced poses. Mental focus and the ability to relax in the posture is more important than flexibility.**  
[all photos by Lincoln Hall]







*Alan Goode and Lulu Bull are certified teachers of the Iyengar method of Yoga. They directed the Newton Yoga Room in Sydney for 10 years, and are currently co-directors of the Blue Mountains Yoga Studio in Katoomba. Alan and Lulu strongly advise against practising yoga close to cliff edges.*

## KNEES

*Hikers, skiers, climbers and cyclists need to have their knees in good order, and this asana will certainly help.*

### **Utkatasana** (fierce pose)

1. Stand with feet together. Inhale and stretch your arms over the head, with palms facing each other. Straighten your elbows and stretch palms and fingers. Use your hands to pull the trunk up strongly.
2. Bend your knees and take your hips back as if preparing to sit. Bend more in the ankle joints and press heels down. Stay for 20 to 30 seconds, breathing normally then come up. Repeat once.

**Benefits:** This pose builds strength in the muscles of the thighs (quadriceps and vastus medialis) and knees. These are the muscles which stabilise the knees.

