

Weekender



Sport

Calender girls of the water ready to tackle quadrathlon



SUPPORT ... Mark Benton, director at Manvers Lake.

A BRAVE group of '50-something' ladies has been taking the plunge in readiness for one of the biggest challenges of their lives.

The women, likened to the Calendar Girls, will be taking part in a quadrathlon (800m swimming, 15k cycling, 4k kayaking, 5k running) at Manvers Waterfront on Sunday.

They have been braving the elements in an inspiring attempt to improve their mental and physical health and broaden their experience.

Mark Benton, director at the Manvers Lake and Dearne Valley Trust, has been working with the women ahead of their daring but perhaps belated arrival on the athletics scene.

"Some of our ladies started coming here when the swimming pools closed during Covid, and now they'd never go back," he said.

"Here, there is no fighting to stay in lanes, no ear infections as the lake water is a lot cleaner than a pool generally speaking.

"They are just ordinary, average people — not stick insects — who understand the therapeutic benefits of cold water



PADDLERS at Manvers Lake, scene of this weekend's quadrathlon to be tackled by older women.

swimming.

"It doesn't matter what shape you are, or what size you are, or what background you have come from, we look after you and try to encourage you.

"Cold water swimming is really good as a therapy for perimenopausal women.

"The ladies liked what we offered, which is a safe, non-judgmental, environment to swim or paddle in. It has had a massive effect. They have now come together as a community and have become more confident and body-confident. Like the Calendar girls!"

Mark (54) said the Manvers mermaids had initially just come to swim only, but he had encouraged them to paddle and cycle.

"About a dozen have had taster events, we taught them to paddle, went out on mountain bikes.

"We developed them by stripping the events into individual ones.

"Doing something like this for the first time is very life-enhancing. It is really good for your mental health. All of them have stepped out of their comfort zone."

Swinton-based Mark, who used to work for Rotherham Council environmental health, will be rooting for the ladies at the Dearne Valley Triathlon/Quadrathlon on Sunday.

"For some of them, it has been absolutely life-changing. Some have doubts they can do it on Sunday, but I know they can.

"The last person back will get the biggest cheer.

"It is an amazing thing and I don't say that lightly.

"Every morning I come here at 5.30am to open up and am blown away that we have so many people to get in."