

ICE QUEENS: With Mark Benton, director of the Manvers Lake Trust, are, from left: Bev, Amber and Justina



## Swimmers talk about loving the cold water

# Chilly dipping!

THESE “ladies of the lake” have ice in their veins — almost literally. Females easily outnumber the men taking the plunge into the freezing winter waters of Manvers.

They do it because it is good for mental and physical health and — oddly enough — because they find it fun.

New Manvers mermaids are arriving to try it every week, determined to use the scenic facility on their doorstep no matter how chilly it is. We attended one of their sessions to find out more from the ice maidens themselves.

Amber Thorpe, from East Herringthorpe, who works with the therapy team at Rotherham Hospital, had never swum outdoors before last month.

The 33-year-old said she'd been considering lake swimming for a while because of the physical and mental health benefits and has now signed up at Manvers.

After her first dip, she said: “I would definitely do it again. It is something I'd want to do regularly now.”

“It was cold but not as bad as I was expecting.” Why not swim in a nice, warm public baths? “Because that is easy, isn't it? This is something challenging,” — she said, adding that lake swimming had brought something new to her life.

Polish-born payroll official Justina Halfmann (39), from Swinton, was swimming in the same session.

Previously she had only ever jogged around the water's edge with her son.

“Today was amazing,” she said, explaining it had also helped her well-being and mental health.

“I love swimming... it is brilliant; I am going to join.”

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Justina said the trick was to control her breathing so she remained calm during the exercise.

There was “initial pain” from the cold at the start of the dip but after that, it was plain sailing.

Justina admitted her family members were unlikely to be joining her — they responded with “wow!” when she told them what she was doing.

Bev Kelly, from Darfield, who works for the Environment Agency, hadn't taken a dip at Manvers before, although she is a spring and summer water-skier elsewhere.

She said she initially felt cold in her hands, neck and back — briefly taking her breath away — but not enough to put her off returning.

Her wetsuit insulated the rest of her body well, she said, adding she would come back even if there was snow on the ground.

The courage of the women involved has impressed Gavin King (57), a part-time worker at

Manvers who helps during open water sessions. He thinks it helps mental well-being because it “takes away the thought of anything else”.

Gavin said: “You just have to forget about everything while you are in the water and concentrate on what you are doing.”

“We get more women open water swimming than men because women say the sessions are good for the menopause, good for the sex life, and good for maintaining a constant body temperature at a time when they were undergoing hot flushes.”

“They can be in maybe ten or 15 minutes, sometimes, depending on who we have got here.”

“The euphoric feeling you get going in and the adrenaline rush keeps you a little bit warm for that time.”

“A lot of people walk by and wonder what is going on but once you explain the benefits they start to understand.”

“We've had people in our cafe who have seen it, thought about it and a couple of weeks later they are out there doing it.”

“We even chip away the ice off the lake when we have to. There are no limits.”

Anybody who wants to join the sessions should call 01709 878984.

## How it helps...

● It aids your immune system by boosting the white blood cell count as the body is forced to react to changing conditions, eventually getting better at defending itself.

● Believe it or not, it gives you a natural high because it activates endorphins, the chemical produced by the brain to make us feel good.

● It improves your circulation as the cold flushes your veins, arteries, and capillaries. It forces blood to the skin's surface and helps “extremities” keep warm.

● It helps in the bedroom, amazingly. Cold water was traditionally seen to repress sexual urges, yet a chilly dip boosts oestrogen and testosterone production — adding an edge to fertility and libido.

● It burns more calories than normal swimming as the heart has to pump faster in cold water.

