

TESTING THE WATER...

Major swimming event arrives at Manvers

A DEARNE Valley beauty spot is to host a huge open water swimming event for the first time this weekend.

The Royal Life Saving Society UK has decided to move its Open Water Festival for this year from Worcester-shire to Manvers Lake.

The event next Sunday, June 4, involves swims of 1,500, 800 or 400 metres for those aged 16 and over, as well as a 200-metre swim for youngsters aged ten to 16, which is also ideal for

open water beginners.

There is also a Rookie Splash for those under ten.

Entry is free for spectators, with water's edge refreshments, face painting, a raffle and water rescue demonstrations from the Manvers Lake Bears Newfoundland dogs among the attractions.

Lee Heard, charity director at RLSS UK, said: "The Open Water Festival is suitable for all ages and abilities. The swim events take place one after the other and are a great way to get the

whole family involved in open water swimming.

"We have seen it increase in popularity over recent years and events such as ours allow it to happen in a fun but safe environment."

Tickets to participate range from £10 to £30, depending on the distance chosen.

Entrants receive a swim hat, goody bag and medal and certificates will be awarded to first, second and third placed swimmers in a presentation ceremony at the end of each swim.

Trained lifeguards and safety measures will be in place throughout the day to ensure everyone is able to enjoy the event safely.

Participants can prepare with a Sponge to Plunge programme to help adjust to the cold temperatures.

Wild swimming community The Bluett's Chill Swimmers will also be attending, with their founder Stan Richardson leading the warm-up.

Visit www.rlss.org.uk/owf or call 0300 323 0096 for more details.

Every dog has its day

FIVE things you might not know about Newfoundlands, who have huge lung capacity:

□ They don't eat much more than a Labrador, says Nicola, or need to be exercised more.

□ They only have a life expectancy of eight to ten years.

□ They are incredibly strong. Nicola once saw a Newfoundland pulling two boats with 21 people on board.

□ In Canada, they weren't just used by fishermen to haul nets but also lumberjacks had them pulling logs from the forest.

□ The Kennel Club Hero Dog Award at Crufts 2022 went to Newfoundland for their work in suicide prevention.



Nicola and Lotty

If you think human competitors will be the stars of the swimming festival this weekend, you would be barking up the wrong tree.

Around 21 "Lake Bears" will steal the show — giant Newfoundland dogs who are bred to save people from drowning.

The furry mutts — which can weigh up to ten stone — will put on a demonstration that will include:

- Rescuing a woman "trapped" under the upturned hull of a boat;
- Lassooing seven swimmers who are "stranded" in the chilly Rotherham waters by circling them with a buoyed rope;
- Pulling ashore two tethered boats with around 12-15 people on board.

If it all seems like a shaggy dog yarn, Newfoundlands have been saving folks in water-borne trouble for generations.

It is in their DNA to plunge in and help. Every dog has its day and Newfoundlands revel in the spotlight, says Nicola Wheeler (44) of Swinton, whose six-year-old bitch Lotty will be "saving" her from the upside-down boat.

She said: "The dogs love taking part in res-



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cues and they will be demonstrating that in several different elements on the day.

"Lotty will go under the boat and bring me back to the shore."

"There is a serious part to this, but it's also a lot of fun to do and the dogs love the water. "Well, most of them do — two of them don't like getting their fluff wet, we just use them as 'suddie' dogs!"

Trainer and mother of three Nicola, who co-runs the 25-dog Manvers Lake Bears Working Newfoundlands group along with her friend Rachel Saunders, said it was "unbelievable" how strong the pets were in the water.

"They were bred for this, they used to aid fishermen and have saved a lot of sailors' lives too," she said.

"They have webbed feet and don't swim doggy paddle — they do a version of the breast-stroke. It's great to watch and an amazing feeling when a Newfoundland 'saves' you."



IN SHE GOES