

A big step forward for Nordic walking fans

Bristol has been chosen to host the UK's first ever Nordic walking race. [Kate Edser](#) explains how this leisure activity is evolving into a competitive sport.

Beautiful Ashton Court Estate in Bristol has been chosen to host Britain's first Nordic walking race on Sunday.

The 850-acre park is already a regular haunt for the growing number of people joining the Bristol Nordic Walking group, who enjoy it as a fitness and social activity.

But, although it's a well-known competitive sport across Europe, and there are plenty of Nordic walking leisure groups in the UK, racing in this country is absolutely new.

Bristol group directors Vicky Welsh and Ros Ingleby, who both have backgrounds as fitness instructors and personal trainers, have teamed up with British Nordic Walking (the umbrella organisation) to offer 5km, 10km and 20km races on July 13.

These will be the first races in a British Nordic Walking Challenge Series, with announcements of further races expected later in the year. Competitors in the 20km class (with Vicky among them) will set off at 9.30am, followed at 10.30am by the 10km racers, with those taking on 5km starting at 11am.

Entry fees are £10, £12 and £15 respectively and to take part you must have had some previous Nordic walking training.

If you're not sure what it's about, but think you might like to try it, Ashton Court, with its mansion, deer park, car park and café, is a lovely place for spectating.

Ros is delighted her home town is staging the first Nordic walking race in Britain.

She said: "It's absolutely brilliant. The British Nordic Walking people know Ashton Court and they suggested the first race should be held here, but it is quite a coup really."

"I am involved in organising it, with a committee, which is very exciting, but Vicky is entered in the 20km race and if she doesn't



Kate Edser with Vicky Welsh, left, and Ros Ingleby, right

win I'll be flabbergasted because she's super-fit!

"We are expecting about 100 entries and it should be quite a spectacle. We have at least 10 people entering from our own group, too."

If your interest is piqued, but you're completely new to Nordic walking, join one of Ros and Vicky's beginners' workshops. The next ones are on July 15 (11am) and July 26 (10am).

After that, you can hook up with one of their regular classes; there's at least one daily, Monday to Saturday, at The Downs in Clifton, Ashton Court Estate, or Blaise Castle Estate.

Don't, however, make the mistake of thinking that using poles makes walking easier. Nordic walking is a very decent workout indeed. In fact, it involves more than 90 per cent of the skeletal muscle system and, once you get into the swing of it, you can apparently burn 46 per cent more calories than ordinary walking.

This is partly because the Nordic version is generally faster than ordinary walking (perhaps 4.5mph) and partly because the purposeful use of poles to propel the body forward engages the upper body and core too.

You'll notice how if you give it a try with any old stick: hold it so your forearm is parallel to the ground, push down and feel those belly muscles tightening.

Vicky says the basic principle is that the better your technique, the more your body works.

"You'll pick up the technique within six sessions, but what happens after three months is that the body has processed the technique and it integrates it, so it becomes natural."

"The people who pick it up the quickest are not the very sporty types, but people who love walking and want to take walking to another level."

For more information, visit the websites bristolnordicwalking.co.uk, or britishnordicwalking.org.uk.