

Jules and Greg's Wild Swim interview

AS one of Scotland's famous celebrity couples, he is best known for his role as Victor McDade in the hit sitcom Still Game and she is loved by millions after playing Miss Hoolie in the popular kids show Balamory.

Now Greg Hemphill and wife Julie Wilson Nimmo have got together for a six part BBC Scotland series revealing their new passion – for wild swimming.

In Jules and Greg's Wild Swim, which starts on Wednesday they reveal how plunging into Scotland's sea coasts, tidal pools, rivers and lochs has changed their lives.

The couple, who have been married for 25 years and have two sons, are so hooked on the benefits of cold water that they now have a barrel in their garden that they use every day for an early morning ice cold dip to start the day.

In the first episode, they're in Glasgow and Edinburgh exploring Scotland's urban cold-water locations – including Granton beach.

Speaking ahead of the first episode, Greg said: "We started it during lockdown. Jules went with a friend for a few months and she would come back like a different person, glowing.

“Eventually I gave it a try and I was absolutely hooked.

“Throughout my life I’ve tried new things and got bored of them – hobbies, going to the gym or different sports, I’d do it for a couple of months and then stop going – but this, I honestly can see myself doing until I’m an old guy.”

Greg, 54, swam competitively as a young teenager in Canada, said that since hitting his fifties, he’s thought more about his health.

He revealed the first person he saw take a restorative ice bath was Sir Andy Murray.

Now he and Julie have their own version in their back garden. And he insists he’s never felt better than after a daily “cold water hit”.

He said: “I saw Andy Murray do it and thought ‘what the hell’s he doing?’ Now we have a barrel out back in our garden. We (each) get in every day.

“At this time of year I’ll sit in it for three minutes, set a stopwatch and put on a bit of music, but in the summer you can stay in it for ten or 15 minutes.

“If we don’t get swimming we’re in the barrel so we’re in the cold water every day one way or the other.

“It’s a great start to the day. You never want to get in but you know that once you do you’re going to feel great. You feel fantastic within about 30 seconds and all day you feel great.

“I’ve felt better since I started doing it. I’ve felt my mind is clearer and I feel younger for the first time in years.”

In the series, Greg and Julie take a three week journey around Scotland in a camper van to discover some of the best places to swim, from the Central Belt to the Hebrides via Moray, Fife and Perthshire.

They meet groups including the Pittenweem Menopausal Mermaids and Seafield Sinkers in Fife, the Nairn Selkies who swim in the Moray Firth, the Wardie Bay Wild Ones in Edinburgh and the Polar Bear Club who take ice baths in Finnieston, Glasgow.

While enduring 11 minutes in an ice bath at zero degrees, Greg says “it’s like you’re outside your body”. Afterwards, he adds: “That was unbelievable. I feel like there’s electricity coursing through my body.”

He said: “We did 11 minutes in the ice. I was cold but I felt great and all day I had a big smile on my face. It was an incredible experience.”

Julie, also known for her role as DC Megan Squire in BBC Scotland comedy show Scot Squad, says: “Who would have thought a tank of ice would provide such an emotional release. It was a fab experience, almost spiritual.”

All the swimmers rave about the benefits of cold water, from helping mental health and relieving the symptoms of menopause to reducing painful muscle inflammation and nerve pain. The groups also provide important support networks.

Greg said: “There are a million reasons why people do it. The community aspect of people coming together and having this common interest is just as important as the physical and mental health benefits.

“For Jules and I, we’re 25 years married this year and it’s lovely doing something together. We always talked about ‘maybe when we’re older we’ll take up golf’.

“We’ve taken this up and it’s such fun to do with somebody close to you – it’s a great bonding thing.”

Greg said he’d love to get Still Game co-creator Ford Kiernan to try cold water swimming – and he insists the nation’s favourite old codgers, Jack and Victor, would share their

passion for the increasingly popular activity.

He said: "I'd love to get Ford in. I'm going to try and convince him.

"Jack and Victor would be good cold water swimmers but they'd have been like 'what's this fuss about wild swimming – it's just swimming."

Jules and Greg's Wild Swim starts Wednesday, 10 January BBC Scotland, 10.00 – 10.30 pm.



Jules and Greg's Wild Swim – Greg Hemphill jumps into waterfall pool in episode 5 Solus Productions/BBC



Jules and Greg's Wild Swim, Greg Hemphill in an ice bath – Solus Productions/BBC



Jules and Greg's Wild Swim Greg Hemphill and Julie Wilson Nimmo at Tobermory Solus Productions/BBC