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# Heath's NZ title earns spot in special event

By Kayla Hodge

Dunedin swimmer Ruby Heath at St Clair in 2023. File photo: Gerard O'Brien

The South African waters are calling for Ruby Heath.

The Dunedin swimmer has booked her spot at the Midmar Mile — the largest open-water swimming event in the world — after winning the national 5km open-water title at the weekend.

Heath, 25, won a sprint finish against Abby Smale, of Wharenui, to claim the title. Heath won in 1hr 6min 19sec, 3sec ahead of Smale, at Lake Taupo.

It showed Heath's resilience after she finished runner-up to Smale the day before in the 10km, which required a photo finish to see who won between the pair.

Heath was eventually awarded silver with her time of 2hr 12min 56sec.

The Neptune swimmer was delighted with her performances through the weekend.

The national title earned her an invitation to the Midmar Mile, in South Africa, alongside men's 5km titleholder Louis Clark, of North Shore, on February 8-9.

Heath has never been to South Africa before, but has heard stories from her parents' travels there and is excited about experiencing it for herself.

"I'm very excited," Heath said.

"It's definitely a place in the world that I've always kind of wanted to go and visit.

"Obviously you see it all in the media of the safaris and the landscapes, and to have the opportunity to go and actually experience it. I'm really excited.

"Then to get to go and do this event ... I've only known about it over the past few years, just through social media and through the open water community.

"But seeing what this event's like, and the amount of people and the place that you actually get to swim in, it's definitely nothing like you get anywhere else."

Heath felt she was in a good position training-wise for the South African water temperatures, considering it was still summer in South Africa and New Zealand.

But most of her training would take place in the pool, which allowed her to prepare for similar situations.

"That tends to be the biggest difference between New Zealand and other parts of the world is our water doesn't get as warm as other places."

Heath will head to Western Australia on Sunday to compete at the Australian open-water championships in Busselton.

She hoped for a good performance to put herself forward for selection for the world championships in Singapore in July.

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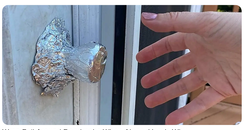
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