

### **The Rescue Cred of Gentle Giants**

If you ever visit the Natural History Museum in Berne, Switzerland, consider stopping by Barry and paying your respects. In his 12 years working with the monks at the Great St. Bernard Hospice, situated in a treacherous 49-mile pass in the Western Alps between Italy and Switzerland, Barry saved the lives of 40 people, lost or buried in the snowy landscape dubbed “The White Death” by Napoleon’s soldiers. As one of the original St. Bernard rescue dogs, Barry’s body was put on exhibit at the museum in 1812 as a testament to the canine courage and service that has graced human history for as long as we have shared our lives with dogs. Big dogs especially.

The St. Bernard is one example of a range of large-breed dogs to whose stamina, strength, and calm disposition—along with carefully bred physical traits that make them perfect for work in certain environments, like water or snow or high altitude—we owe countless human lives. Others include dogs such as Great Pyrenees, Leonbergers, Bernese Mountain Dogs, and, since we touched on the topic of Napoleon, Newfoundlands. An unnamed Newfie is credited with saving the emperor’s life when rough seas knocked him from the fishing boat in which he escaped his exile on the island of Elba. It was also a Newfie, Seaman, who famously accompanied explorers Lewis and Clark on their Corps of Discovery expedition from 1804 to 1806, saving both men repeatedly from drowning, bear attacks, stampeding buffalos, and more.

Not to be size-ist, of course. Each and every day dogs—small, medium, and large—perform all sorts of heroics. They warn us of snakes, save us from burning buildings, track down lost kids, alert rescuers to injured or unconscious people. The list is endless. But surely giant breeds deserve a special place in our collective heart. For centuries, long before movies and the Internet made stars of canine heroes, these gentle pony-sized dogs saved our lives in some of the most inhospitable and challenging surroundings on the planet.