

Warrington Dolphins 50th Anniversary Channel Relay

Personal reflection by Rob Waterhouse

Now I'm back from Dover I'm a little overwhelmed at what we achieved as a team on Sunday, and so proud that we completed a channel relay in 15hrs 15mins in the clubs 50th year anniversary.

It has been a pleasure to have swum this weekend with Andy Sherratt, Margaret Smith, Marc Pomfret, Alan Pomfret and Stephne Douglas - these swimmers did an amazing job, showed great courage, and were absolutely fantastic to have a laugh and a talk to on the boat, "Anastasia". It was also great to speak with Margaret's husband Graham who supported us in training sessions by watching over our belongings, during our relay by speaking with us, and after the swim in congratulating us, many thanks Graham ☺.

So here goes...

Tuesday 24th June

The training was complete and Andy had received a call from our pilot Eddie Spelling of "Anastasia" that we were looking good for a swim from Wednesday 25th June. Margaret and Graham would be staying at the Carlton Hotel in Folkestone, so Andy, Stephne and I decided to travel down and join Margaret and Graham at the same hotel.

Due to work commitments Alan and Marc would hold off until we were 100% sure of the swim day, we would therefore keep Marc and Alan up to date when Eddie had more information for us.

We had a lovely dinner at an Italian restaurant around the corner from the hotel and a few beers. It was so good to finally meet Margaret and her husband Graham where we discussed previous swims, it was a really relaxed atmosphere.

Eddie texted that we would get at least a 12 hour warning and were likely to swim on Thursday or Friday, so we decided to have a couple of beers in hotel bar whilst watching a bit of World Cup football.

Wednesday 25th June

We had a full breakfast in the hotel, and awaited further updates from Eddie.

I wanted to drive to Dover to check out the Marina so I knew where I was going. We arrived at Dover and as Andy stepped out of the car his phone went, it was a text from Eddie - we might now be swimming on Sunday and to hang around Dover for the moment. Andy looked really deflated when he told Stephne and I of the news.

We walked along the Marina where the Champion of Champion event was held the weekend before but the conversation soon dried up as we pondered what was meant by the text. Was Sunday the latest or earliest date? We silently walked back to the car and decided we would have a swim with Margaret and Graham at Shakespeare beach to decide next steps.

We sat on the pebbled beach watching the fisherman as we looked on out to sea, it was a breezy but pleasant morning. Andy decided to call Eddie to clarify his text but his phone was switched off. Andy and I agreed that if the decision was to swim Sunday that we would drive back to Warrington.

So we decided to "wet the goggles" whilst we were here and have a swim in the sea. Margaret and Graham arrived and we decided to swim along the shore as the weather looked to be closing in although it was still sunny for now. The water temperature felt fine and really enjoyed the swim, it calmed any nerves and was great to have a stretch, but I forgot my sun cream and caught the sun!

We decided we should have a team lunch at a Wetherspoons. Stephne had a post code that she handed to Margaret and me to key in the Sat Nav. I drove Andy and Stephne, with Margaret and Graham following (or at least that's what we thought!) ☺ . I parked the car at the "Sir Norman Wisdom" in **Deal** and waited for Margaret and Graham to arrive - 10 minutes passed still no sign! Margaret rang, "We have just passed the sign welcoming you to **Folkestone** but cannot find this Wetherspoons" We realised that we were all going to have lunch 20 miles apart! ☺

Later in the day Eddie rang Andy back and said that there was a team going that night, and that we should take a few days off as it looks like an 0715 start on Sunday for us. With this news I decided to test out the Guinness in a pub next to the hotel. Stephne would also join me; unfortunately I needed several samples of the good stuff to be convinced if I liked it sitting in the beer garden overlooking the sea (it's part of the training to relax ☺). Andy then joined us, and I also remember a gentleman from Scotland randomly sitting next to me who had a great sense of humour! He thought we were mad swimming in the channel and wished us luck as Margaret and Graham joined us. We decided to share some Nachos and other nibbles which gave us an appetite and decided that should eat out again!

We decided to go to a Mexican restaurant and have a few drinks, it was fab food and really enjoyed the conversations then to watch more World Cup football. ☺ This is like a mini holiday! ☺

Back to the hotel for another round of drinks and more World Cup football ☺

Thursday 26th June

Had a full breakfast again (could get used to this!) and we decided to "wet the goggles" again by having a swim in Folkestone. I mentioned that I would only do 20 mins due to the drive back to Warrington.

We got to the beach by funicular railway (which I don't like, fearing that it will break, though I didn't say anything at the time!). It was fab - what a break we're having! ☺ We got changed by the shore and swam out, the water was so warm. The sun was shining and we were really enjoying this session BUT the currents were taking us out! We swam back to shore, it was hard work! There was a dog and his owner stood watching, I swam for a further 5 minutes, they were still there....I was going nowhere! The sea was powerful, but we did 50 minutes - a bit more than 20!

Andy and I then left for Warrington which took 8hrs, bloody horrible traffic!

Friday 27th June

Working from home! Enough said! ☹

Had a message from Christian Wade on Facebook that, "All those swimmers back from Dover, it's the Marbury Park Handicap tonight". I was tempted but I think that I may have had a Guinness at the Little Manor (just 1 pint!) or maybe 2 ☺

Saturday 28th June

Andy calls me "we need to leave, our swim is on for tomorrow, 0815 at Dover Marina". I picked Andy up at Orford Jubilee at 13:30 and left for Dover.

Alan and Marc would also join us and booked into the same hotel, the Britannia in Folkestone.

We met up with Margaret, Graham and Stephne and went to an Italian restaurant to stock up on some pasta! Note that I had a diet coke and water and not a Guinness! *(OK Rob, we get the message, you like Guinness - Andy).*

The hotel room was great but I didn't like the yapping dog next door!! And the night club underneath was just what you want when going for a swim; however my view was out to sea though and looked amazing! Then there was the drunken people deciding to dance down the corridors! Oh and the fire alarm went off at 0130 and an announcement "not to evacuate were locating what the problem is"

Sunday 29th June

After an eventful night I downed some water, drank some Lucozade, had 2 bananas, 2 cups of coffee and ate an all day breakfast butty from the Service station that I bought yesterday! I then take my sea sick tablets, advice given from many Dolphin swimmers...(Brilliant advice by the way)!

At 07:15 I meet up with Alan, Marc and Andy at reception before driving to Dover where we meet up with Margaret, Graham and Stephne.

Stephne was pointing to her watch as we pulled up as we were half an hour later than we said! Sorry Stephne! 😊

We met our Observer for the day Loretta Cox (an experienced long distance swimmer) who took a 6 team photos, one for each camera phone! Here is one.



Margaret Smith, Rob Waterhouse, Andy Sherratt, Stephne Douglas, Marc Pomfret, Alan Pomfret

I was certainly feeling the nerves now.

We then met Eddie Spelling, our pilot, who asked us to load our stuff on the boat. We then gave our passport details to one of the members of the crew, then our medical history to Loretta. We were all packed up and ready to go and we headed off to Shakespeare beach!

I captured some pictures and posted the following on Facebook...



Rob Waterhouse

29 June

We've left!! See u soon!!



08:52 – Marc Pomfret starts to get ready for the swim, he applies suncream, puts on his swim cap, and is ready at the back of the boat. The boat then stops a few hundred metres from the shore and Marc swims to the beach and stands on the pebbles.

Lorretta waves her hands to start and we're off - Marc starts the relay in fine form. He looked really comfortable and was making great progress away from the UK - what a fantastic start.

I open the jelly babies! Yum!

Our pilot Eddie Spelling tweets:-



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29 June

Morning World,
On the menu today we have the Warrington Dolphins.
A Team of 6 swimmers
No1 Marc Pomfret
Water Temp a sunny 16c
Air 16.8c
Wind 8kn N/W
Sea State Slight.
Started swim from Shakespeare beach at 0852hrs

Let Battle Commence



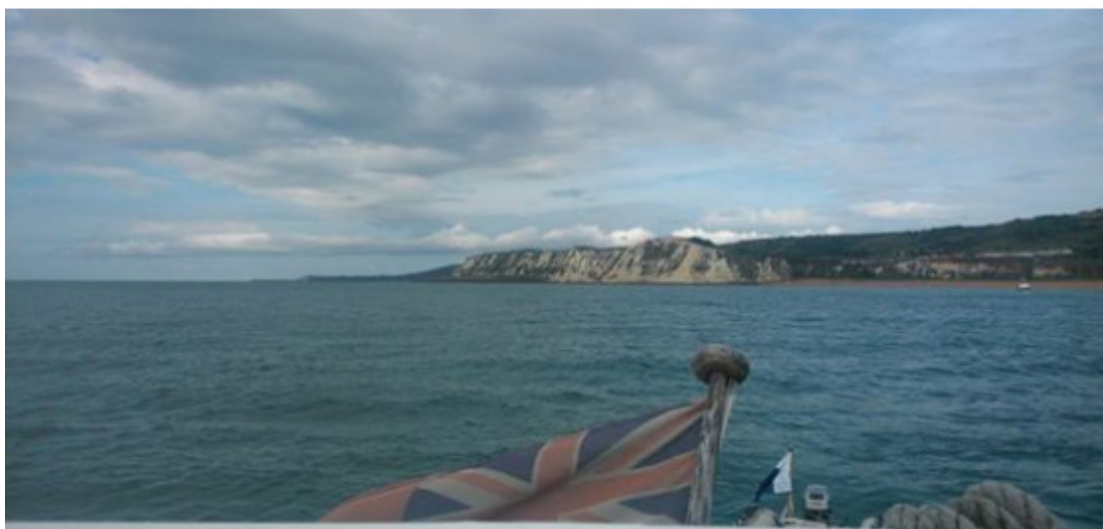
Marc Pomfret starts the relay at 08:52



Rob Waterhouse

29 June

Marc is swimming 😊



It was important that our pilot Eddie has a clear view of the swimmer, and that we did not obstruct his view. He therefore imparted these words of wisdom....."If your a**e ain't made of glass, don't walk past". Well said Eddie 😊

Stephne Douglas was now getting ready for her stint in the water and asks me for a cup of tea when she completes her swim. Alan is watching Marc swim at the side of the boat. Margaret, Graham, Andy and I are sat near each other having a chat and looking pleased that were finally off!

09:52 Stephne Douglas enters the water....Go Stephne! Marc then climbs out of the water.

Eddie Spelling tweets:-



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29 June · Edited

No2 Stephne Douglas

Water 16c

Air 13.8

wind 11.8kn

Sea State Slight with small lumps

Wheres the Sun Gone

Another great swim, we're off to a great start!



Marc dries off on board, he gave us a great start and looked a bit queezy when he walked on the boat, so much so, that he felt the need to "feed the fishes" (one of the unenviable parts of the swim). However, after a few minutes he was fine and was able to relax with the rest of the team.

Andy Sherratt is sat next to me taking on the energy drinks, putting the sun cream on, and staring over to the water. Not long to go now Andy "You'll be fine" I say to him.



Rob Waterhouse

29 June

See u soon great Britain!! x



The sun is starting to disappear but Stephne is still swimming strongly in her first leg.

Stephne is given her 10 minute warning so I make her some tea. Eddie shows me how to work the kettle and stresses to pour the hot water in the cup in the sink. However, I left the milk on the side whilst making the tea and Eddie points out that we dont want milk on the floor!!!! Sorry! ☺

I'm below deck and I start to feel a little sea sick whilst making Stehpne's cup of tea! I dont think Stephne would appreciate me adding anything else to her drink! ☹ Managed to hold out - those tablets are doing okay and as I walk up to the top deck I see Stephne.

10:52 Andy Sherratt enters the water, is swimming great and looks really at ease.

Eddie Spelling writes:-



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29 June

No3 Andy Sherrett

Water 16c

Air 16

Wind 7.1kn N/E

Sea State Slight Chop

Waiting for the tide to turn then of to see the varne lightship

I'm watching Andy swimming at the side of the boat....I'm next! So off to the jelly babies, Lucozade Sport and a banana before I get in. On with the sun cream and Vaseline and I'm ready..cant wait, this is it!.

Andy is given the hand signal that I'm entering the water.

11:52 I lower myself down the steps at the rear of the boat and given the nod to get in!

Eddie Spelling tweets:-



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And the next up is
No4 Rob Waterhouse
Water 16c
Air 16.1
Wind 5.6 N/E

The tide is turning late due to N/E wind, but heading south before the tide takes us of to the east.

Oooh it feels cold! Then I just start swimming and no longer feel the cool water! 😊

The water is a lovely blue as it reflects off the sun, temperature is now fine. I can see Margaret, Alan and Loretta watching at the rear of the boat, I think I see Stephne sat at the front of the boat.

Right, so I'm in the sea! How weird is this! I start looking at my technique I feel comfortable so start pushing myself a little faster. I see Alan waving at me....oh, I'm swimming away from the boat so need to swim back in. I swim so I'm at the front of the boat next to the name "Anastasia" and just keep focused on the name.

I see large ships, wonder if were entering the shipping lanes now?

I have just been given the 10 minute warning, blimey that went quick!!

Now its Alan's turn and so happy that my first leg went smoothly - I really enjoyed that!

Go Alan!

12:52 Alan enters the water.



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No5 Alan Pomfret

Water 16c

Air 18.2

Wind 1.8kn N/E

Sea State Slight, nice long swell to stir the tea

Optimist just ahead has enters the lane just 200m for us to enter



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29 June 🌐

Just entered S/Wlane



I dry myself down in the shower room. I suddenly realise that drying yourself and getting changed on a rocking boat is challenging!

I now open the Crackers! Yum, and head for the deck.

13:52 Margaret Smith enters the water



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No6 Margret Smith.

Water 17c

Air 17.7

Wind 1.6kn

Sea state slight

Way to go Maggie 69 years young





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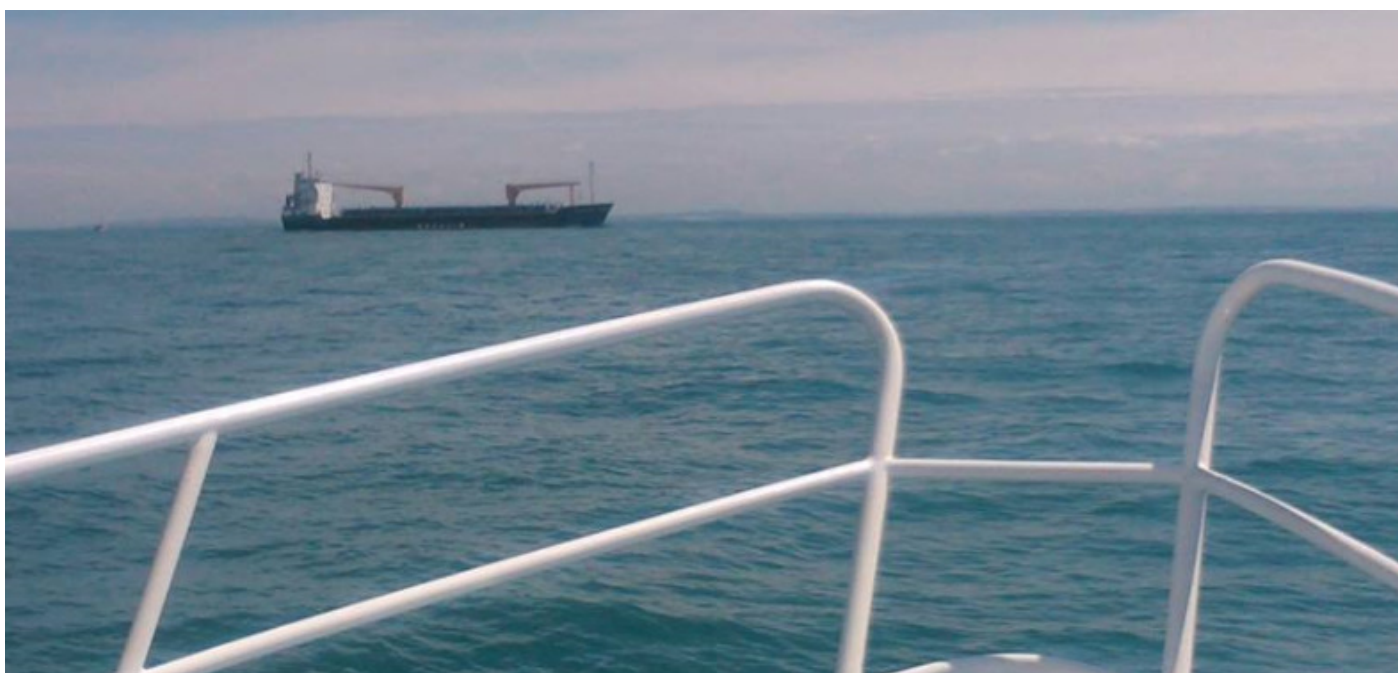
29 June 🌐

Hello Varnelight



Andy Sherratt takes a nap at the front of the boat after his first swim.

I then take a nap after Andy at the front of the boat, watching the large ships whilst listening to Coldplay....ahhhh bliss!!



14:52 Marc enters the water for a second time, the weather seems to be turning



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No1 back in and off we go again.

Get in there, and wheres the sunshine gone again



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Yes, all is not lost... We are exporting....to Le Havre



Watch out Marc there are some large ships!

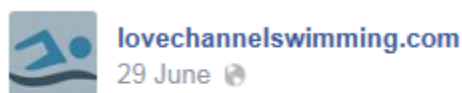
Marc hits a jelly fish on the head....well it is the world cup!



Rob, Stephne and Andy relaxing at the back, gearing up for round 2!

It starts pouring down!! Go Marc this is a challenging 2nd leg!

15:52 Stephne enters the water again.



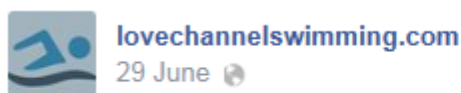
No2 back in, where 1 mile from the separation zone, her aim is to swim us in to the French N/E lane 2 miles in an hour.

Go Girl.

Stephne is closing in on the separation zone, theres loads of seaweed! Stephne is working hard.

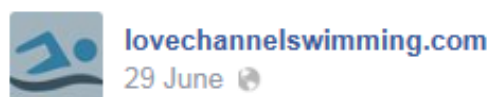
Stephne hits a Jelly Fish on her nose! Thats two swimmers in contact with Jellies!

Stephne watch out, there are a few of them now in the water! Blue, brown and the friendly white moon jellies. This is a challenging swim with a lot of “obstacles”!



Enter Separation zone 1618hrs she has 36 mins to cover a mile to get us into the the N/E Lane

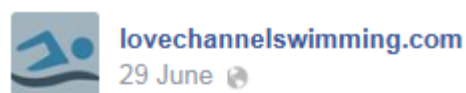
16:52 – Andy is back in for round 2!



No3 back in and No2 just short 200mt but well swam

Andy looks relaxed, but the water is starting to become a little choppy!

Andy is stung a couple of times, on his foot and his arm – great swim Andy hope your ok.



Enter N/E Lane 1702hrs

Heavy Rain

Water 15.5c

Air 15.8

Wind 3.8kn N/W

Sea state slight

All going well

Andy's towel is thrown into the water by the wind. Ooops!!

Rob is drunk!! No its just the choppy water, he's falling everywhere!! Margaret encourages to sit down before he causes an injury, especially when he loses it completely and goes towards the rails!

Rob's phone then drops out of his pocket and slides to the edge of the deck ready to go into the water....he recovers it just in time!

Rob takes Margaret's advice and sits down – it's much safer haha! ☺

17:52 Rob enters the water again!

Blimey its choppy! Cannot see the boat at times...this is a hard second leg as the waves are quite large now. Hit a couple of jellies in the process (bloody horrible things, especially the brown looking ones!) Jellies are my worst nightmare ☹. Big arm pulls required for this one!!

Just need to keep going, the waves seem to be dropping slightly now and I pick up my rhythm again. Will be glad to be back on the boat...

So glad to see a topless Alan Pomfret !! Must be time for me to change with him! Phew, I'm knackered!

I'm getting great support at the back of the boat – Thanks guys!! ☺

Good Luck Alan!! Have a good swim!

18:52 Alan enters the water



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Yes where back on line with trustee dog and bone

In the middle of the N/E lane and it's a bit kicky but hand able

No5 is in and hoping for the sea to flatten when young maggie pops back in

Alan is going well! It's still choppy out there, I hope he's ok! I quickly change and find it really hard to put my tracksuit bottoms on with the boat moving!

Its starting to rain again and its getting rather cold! We all wrap up warm and watch Alan at the side..he's going really well.

Eddie comes out and looks a little concerned. We need to keep a good pace on our next swims to be sure that we reach buoy ZC2 before the tide turns.

19:52 Margaret enters the water.

Margaret nearly comes a cropper when she slips on deck whilst preparing for her swim. The team help to steady her....thankfully she's ok and there's no damage done.

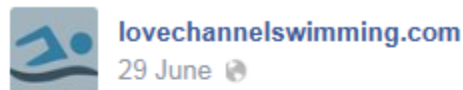
Go Margaret, the water is still a little choppy and there is a storm brewing again! Keep on going Margaret your looking good! Your having a brilliant swim in very difficult conditions!

Margaret looks so comfortable in the water.

Great swim Margaret!! This is brilliant!

20:52 - Marc enters the water for round 3! Its getting dark so light sticks on!

It starts raining....Marc is really powering through, he's going for it!



With No1 back and some power going we are just inside zc2 fighting now a
across the tide shore just insight through the rain with 3.5 miles to the cap

More storms are coming over and it starts raining again, but France is getting closer!! At last were getting close now!

Mark hits 3 Oyster pots and they hit him in the face!!! I hope he's ok!

A few choice words and he appears fine now and starts swimming again....keep going Marc you're swimming brilliantly!

It's getting really dark now and the wind and rain is starting again ☹

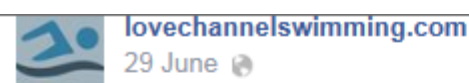
21:52 – Stephne enters the water who is really swimming brilliantly... we're so close now you can see land' We're nearly there!

I watch Stephne swim from inside the boat (it's warmer in there...glad I'm not in that water!. All that you can see are the two green light sticks now....she is going fast!

Stephne has given it everything and is feeling a little nauseous.....more "feeding the fishes" ☹

Eddie advises that it will be Andy or me to touch France.

22:52 Andy goes into the water for round 3!



Good news Folks

I have had a good sleep and woke to crew and swimmers have worked hard
with No 1&2 swam and No3 on the way in with 1 mile to go

😊 happy skipper

Andy is swimming brilliantly, he's really going well. It's dark now and it's still raining a little! We cannot see where we are going to touch land but the lighthouse is level with the boat to our left. Eddie advises that we will use the change in tide to motor to the shoreline. I can hear the French coast guard on his radio...were so close!

Rob takes advice from Eddie on what to do when he touches France. We should be there soon!

What a great swim Andy.

23:52 – I enter the water.

Previous to getting in I was advised to go for it by the rest of the team. They are all fantastic!

I enter the water and give it everything. I left the boat behind as Andy climbed aboard and I swim into what seemed like nothing - dark water and dark air. My arms and shoulders are hurting - I think I went out a bit too fast then! I'm not doing a 50m sprint! My legs are useless, no leg kick at all and I feel exhausted. At last "Anastasia" has caught up and all I can hear is the water whooshing in my ears, I cannot see anything below me. I briefly stop to check I'm doing ok and I hear "Get moving Rob, come on keep going" so I'm encouraged to swim fast to fight the oncoming changing tide. I think I hit an lobster pot in the sea and I can see the team pulling what looks like bunting away from me. I stop to check and say a few choice words and carry on.

I'm confused! What do I do, keep swimming? Did they say the dinghy would just come alongside me or was I to get a signal. I can see a flash! So I stop again! "Keep going Rob" So off I go again! What was that flash??

No light in France; as I look ahead inbetween strokes I think its a rocky area. Anastasia has stopped, I can see the dinghy now....we must be near land! I stop, the pilot says to me to keep going and says it's quite choppy! I reply "Tell me about it!!" Why has the dinghy stopped, whats going on?? The pilot says he cannot go any further, I reply "What!" and he says "you need swim the remaining leg alone! I shout "is no one able to come with me?". The pilot said "no, you will be fine, focus on the land in front of you". I must be close so give it everything, it feels like when I'm trying to sprint on a Sunday and have nothing left in the tank

Oh whats that "stuff"! I think I just hit a jelly or something, there's something else, now I can feel grass against my stomach, or I think that's what it is. I'm guessing that's seaweed that I have just hit.

Brilliant, I feel rocks!!! Thank **** for that!! There's a large rock I can climb on, I cannot stand up on the floor, so I lift myself up and crouch up as the wind is strong - I'm not standing on the rock .

I hear the pilot in the dinghy shout, "well done you have completed the swim, now swim back to the boat".

I reach the boat and the pilot hands me a rope to put around my left foot to lift me in, but we cannot get me in. So in an "undignified way" I grab with both hands onto a handle on the side, lift my right leg over, and clamber in! He laughs! So do I because we completed the swim and I'm so happy and proud!!

We race back to "Anastasia" to claps and cheers! What a great moment!

We did it guys!

Some celebratory whisky courtesy of Marc is required!



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30 June 🌐

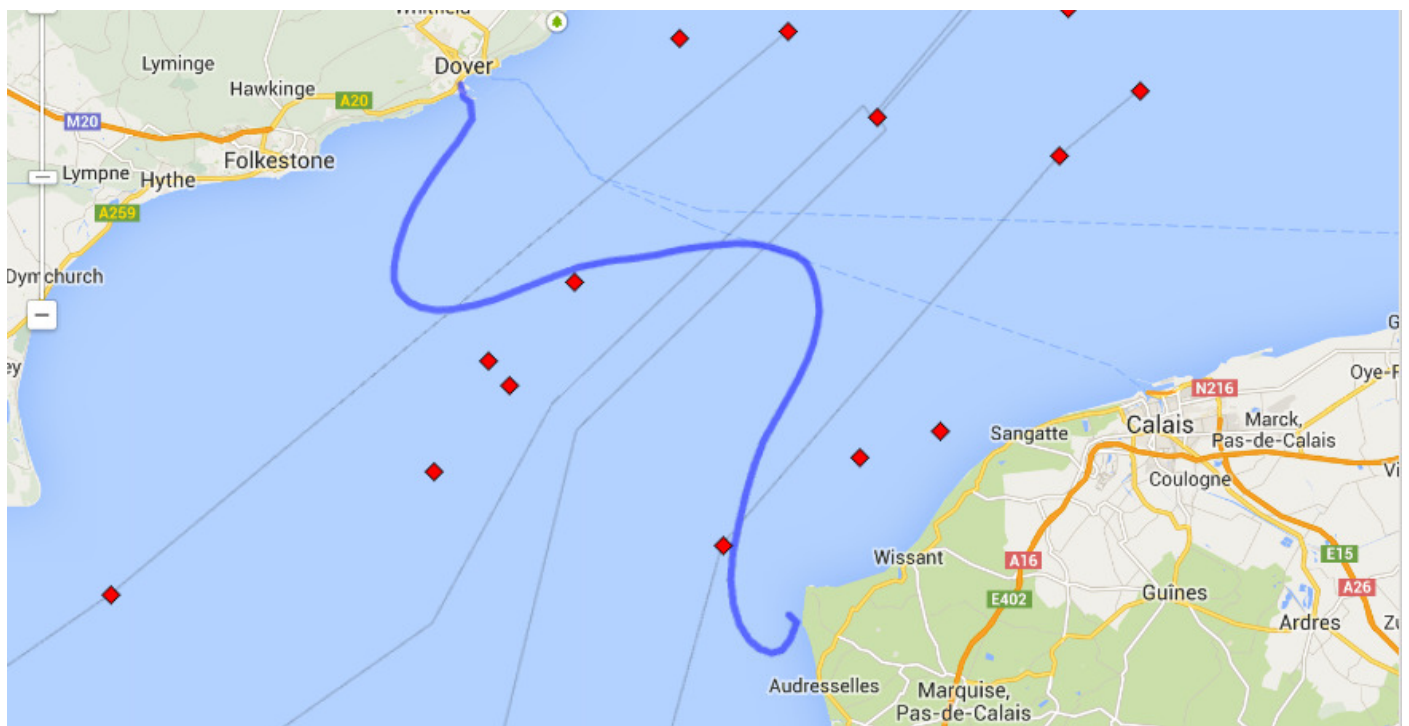
Well they done it.

Landed at pte Du Ridden in 15hrs 15min

Big well done team.

Now for some ferry dogeing

Homeward Bound



Rob Waterhouse

3rd July 2014