

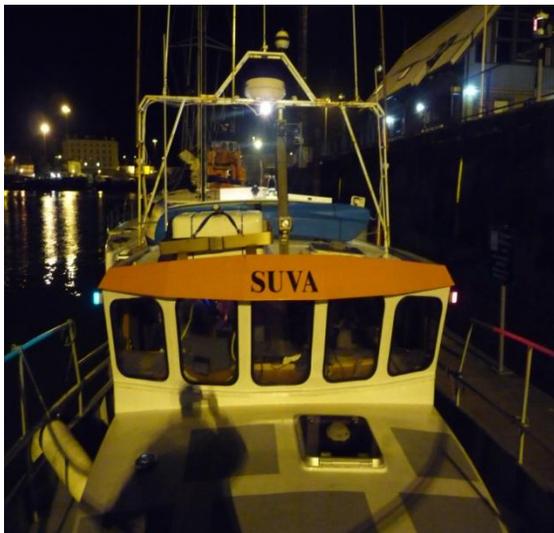
A personal account of Warrington Dolphin's Channel relay swims 31st August 2010

The long wait for the relay swim was nearly over when the text from Andy arrived on Sunday afternoon. It said the swim was on and that we needed to be on the boat for midnight the following day for a 2am start Tuesday morning.

The origins of wanting to do a relay swim across the English Channel go back several years to soon after I joined Warrington Dolphins and heard about previous relays organised by the club. I had thought seriously about joining the team that completed the two-way crossing in 2007 but I decided would be too ambitious a swim for me at that stage. The next opportunity was the planned one-way crossing in 2010. The swim was booked in summer 2008 and was very popular within the club resulting in three boats being booked for eighteen swimmers (three six person teams). The relay was due to happen in the week starting 17th August but our one week "slot" past with no break in the poor weather conditions. This poor weather continued during the 2nd week and I started to seriously doubt if the swim would happen this season.

During the journey down to Dover on the Monday I learnt the original planned three teams were to be "re-jigged" to two teams one managed by Chris Carter and one by Michaela as unfortunately not all the swimmers were available to swim. I was in Michaela's team which was comprised of four young, fast swimmers (Charlotte, Connor, Courtney and Eve) and Jo Norton-Barker and myself. We arrived at Dover Marina about 11pm and got ourselves organised and chatted to other teams swimming that night.

We boarded our boat "Suva" piloted by Neil Streeter (Alison's brother) about 1am.



Suva

Our observer from the CS&PF Pam introduced herself and then asked for swimmers details and the order we wanted to swim in. (Under the relay rules we had to stick to this order once declared. Each swimmer swims for one hour in turn to this declared swim order). We soon headed off out of the harbour to the start at Samphire Hoe beach. Connor was our first swimmer; he swam from the boat to

the beach and on a signal started swimming about 1:30am. So the boat can see the swimmer in the dark they are wear “nightsticks” so they are visible in the dark.



Connor getting ready to start the swim

The Dolphin’s other team aboard Anastasia started before us and had about a four hundred metre lead on us. As Suva headed out away from the beach we could see the lights from the other boats (a total of seven) escorting swimmers that night. The sea was black with the moon reflecting off it and the sky was clear with stars visible. Instructions were occasionally shouted to Connor to either swim closer to the boat or further away. Connor completed his hour under the watchful eyes of the observer and Michaela. He had swum a good first leg considering it was his first ever night swim. Jo took over swimming the next leg and swam strongly alongside the boat. Changeovers’ continued and dawn broke about 5:30am and I could see the other boats were now widely separated and we were now well away from shore. The sea had quite a big swell to it. It was at this stage that I started to suffer with seasickness despite taking tablets. I was last in the team to swim at 6:30 and I just aimed to swim steadily and ensure I followed the boat. The sea temperature was good (about 17c) and water clear. I felt ok for about 45mins and then started to feel ill while swimming.

Connor took over from me so I could crawl back on aboard to stare rigidly at the horizon and pray the seasickness would pass. Jo was also suffering. However, all the team swam strongly each taking us closer to France.



Swimming well

Fortunately, as we got closer to France the sea became a bit calmer and I started to feel better, eating ginger biscuits and an apple. As my turn for swimming approached we were quite close to French shore and it was likely I was going to finish the swim. Pam gave me a “pep talk” telling me to swim hard & kick my legs (my normal technique is minimal leg kick) and told me I just had 0.8 mile to swim.



View to the French shore

On the changeover I did as I was told and swam hard for shore.



Swimming for shore

I was followed by Connor during this final leg (the rules allow this provided they don't go ahead of the declared swimmer). As I approached the land the sea warmed up, to over 20c, within 10 metres of shore I tried touching the bottom but it was too deep. On touching the rocks I managed to get a footing and climb out and clamber clear of the water. I was very pleased to finish the swim for the team.



The Finish

The total swim time was 11hrs 31 mins so it had taken me 31 mins to finish. We stopped briefly alongside our other team on the way back to Dover to wish them well in finishing the swim. Jo & I decided we liked swimming with fast swimmers in our team who had got us across in a fast time so we avoided a possible 3rd swim or problems with the tide changing.



Micheala, Jo, Courtney & Connor

It was a great experience and I'm pleased I've finally done a relay. I now got even greater respect for any swimmer who attempts a solo swim having covered the distance and seen how variable the conditions can be. Many thanks to my team members and the team managers for organising the swim.

David

6th Sept 2010