

I write to you on behalf of Team Ichthyosaur who successfully completed their swim of the English Channel on 13th July in a time of 11hrs 56mins, recording the 5th fastest relay swim of the year at the time of writing (children & adults).

The financial support you provided has been greatly received by the children making this challenge happen which will last with them for the rest of their lives. They have now joined an Elite Group of swimmers who have given up a significant amount of time to train for this and shown sheer determination in undertaking the crossing.

As a relay team swimming 1 hr at a time may not seem an extreme challenge however there is a big difference between swimming for an hour in a leisure pool and swimming continuously for an hour in the open water of a channel. The children have had to cope with waters in the region of 17 degrees, night-time swimming, a reasonably large swell jellyfish which resulted in most of the swimmers getting stung at one point during the crossing.

The team have had their highs and lows since they decided to undertake this challenge in May 2016. At the start of the year due to a re-occurrence of a previous illness one of the team had to pull out prior to training commencing in earnest. Luckily another swimmer from the club whom had little open swimming experience stepped into the gap showing clear determination and excitement to be part of the team.

Training started in March with swims at Clevedon and Weymouth, initially short and in wetsuits and as the weeks went by the times went up and wetsuits banished to cupboards at home. By early June they were all up to swimming for an hour at a time in open waters. By the end of June, they had all shown that they can swim for 2hrs in temperatures less than 16 degrees at Weymouth clearing the way for the actual crossing swim. At the start of July as their last piece of training they all competed in the Southwest Regional Swimming Championship at Weymouth. This was a resounding success with the team collecting the 5km Regional Junior Cup for both Boy and Girls along with a number of other regional and county medals in the 3km and 1.5km distances.

The week post these races saw a significant blow to the team with literally less than 1 week to go before the race, another member of the team had to pull out after sustaining an injury to the hand requiring an emergency operation. This was really hard for all the team and options were extremely limited with regards deferring to a later date or going ahead on the planned date. The issue was discussed with the boat pilot and it soon became apparent that we had to go when planned and find another person urgently to join the team. The Channel Swimming Association emailed out an urgent SOS for a new swimmer to join our team. With luck, a girl (Robyn) from Yorkshire came forward who had already swam as a team less than 3 weeks earlier to go again and fill the gap.

So, the adventure started for the actual swim with us all setting off for Dover on the Wednesday morning with the aim of swimming on the tide at 1.00am on Thursday morning. On arrival at Dover it was unclear if the conditions would be good enough at the French side to allow us to do the crossing. At 7.00pm it was still unclear if we would go and the pilot said he would be in touch at 12.15am to say if we were going or if we had to wait for the next tide. At 12.15am we received the text to say good to go and it was then a scramble to get cars packed with kids, food and equipment for the drive to the harbour for a 1.00am start. On arrival the atmosphere was buzzing as there was 4 other boats taking swimmers out at the same time as us.

We quickly loaded up and set off for the coast line start area. On arrival at the starting point, Sophie the first swimmer had to jump in and swim to the shore in the dark. Once on shore she had to wait for the ships horn to blow to signify that she could enter the water and start the first hour of the swim. It was an exciting moment as she started and we headed off for France in the inky dark light of the channel. Sophie made good ground and it was soon upto Bobby to dive in and put some more good distance in so that we did not have to fight the tide coming into France. Light was starting to appear on the horizon as Matthew the third swimmer entered the water for his first leg whilst Sophie and Bobby who had gone before him had changed into dry clothes and got down to some food and rest before they went again.

It did not seem long before the day was getting lighter and it was time for Katie, followed by Robyn and Finally Jessica to do their first legs. Between swims it was time to eat, rest, provide encouragement to the swimmer in the water and take stock of the massive container vessels we were sharing the channel with.

As the team started their second legs the sea was a little calmer although all still had to battle with the dreaded Jellyfish which continued to cause mischief.

As we got close to the completion of the second legs it was not clear who would actually land in France, Jessica the last swimmer on the second leg and Sophie as the first swimmer to do a third leg who had started off the swim on Dover.

As Jessica went into the water as the last swimmer of the second leg she had 2.5miles to do with an unfavourable tide. She had already been advised as she went in that it was unlikely that she would achieve land and that would fall to Sophie. However, she was determined that she would complete the swim in under 12 hours for the team. At the half hour point it was clear from the distance she had put in that she would make it to France within the hour. As we got closer to France the escort boat put down anchor and the landing boat followed Jessica in for the last 150 metres.

The challenge of the swim was not over however, the tide that they had encountered meant that Jessica was not going to get a beach landing but was swimming towards a rock face. As she reached the rocks the landing boat stopped short of the rocks as Jessica had to climb the rocks clear of the water to register the completion of the swim to the cheer of the rest of the team.

The 2.5hr journey back to Dover with pretty quiet as all of the team crashed on the deck of the boat to get some sleep prior to coming back into Dover. As we reached the marina we were met by the rest of the parents who has anxiously waited in Dover for the return watching progress via the internet.

As stated at the start this will live for them forever and as they continue their journey through life, how many can say they have swam the English Channel. Your kind support has allowed this to happen and it has been greatly received by all. The children have been fund raising in parallel for a charity called Make – A – Wish, which support children with terminal and serious illnesses undertake something that family circumstances could not afford to do. For this charity they have raised just short of £4000.

Now it is over the team look to their next challenges, some are looking to gain acceptance to the British Triathlon Super Series were the top 60 youths in the country battle it out, others to Regional and National Entries at indoor swimming and the gutsy Bobby has signed up to go back next year and do a solo of the channel.

We thank you immensely for your support and hope you have found the letter an interesting read of the journey they have taken.

As well as the pictures provided with this mail, you can find details of the crossing and other pictures at the following link.

www.channelswimmingassociation.com/swim/4645/team-ichthyosaur

On behalf of

Matthew, Sophie, Jessica, Bobby, Kaite & Robyn

Karl Hudson

Parent (Jessica Hudson)