

Scott's English Channel Swim: The Swim that nearly didn't happen!

Lisa, Jana, and I arrived in London on September 14th, headed south to Dover, picked-up a rental car, drove on the "wrong" side of the road and made it to Varne Ridge, the famous among Channel Swimmers place to stay in Dover. It's 10 or so double wide trailers located on a bluff, looking out over the Channel. The walls of the buildings are covered with plaques of swimmers who have stayed there and completed the Channel.

We settled in, thinking we had a few days to acclimate before the swim. Weather was around 70, blue skies, and picturesque. The next day I did a short swim in a protected bay (similar to Aquatic Park), water felt great and I felt confident about my big swim. I was lined up with my boat Pilot as the #4 swimmer (I had signed up nearly 2 years prior for this spot) and there was an 8 day tidal window beginning on the 16th. On the 17th the first swimmer made his attempt, only to stop after about 6 hours. That night the weather turned for the worse and the forecast called for dropping temperatures and 40-50 mph winds.

We spent our days sightseeing to neighboring villages and actually having a great time. But, in the evenings, the conversation eventually would turn to the weather forecast and it became clear that I probably would not get a chance to swim. We met with the boat captain Friday, the 21st, to discuss how it works to reschedule the swim to another year. We made plans to head to London on Sunday for some sightseeing before heading back home. We were done! The swim was not happening this year.

Then on Saturday morning, the Boat Pilot texts to ask if I could stay one day longer, the weather may be changing! Unbelievable! Now the energy shifts, my whole mindset shifts, and we focus on changing plans, flights, etc. Jana, Lisa, and I are completely stoked that we will actually get to attempt what we all came here for.

The swim started on Monday night, September 24th at 11:15 p.m. At night, the seas are calmer, winds lighter. Unfortunately, it's also colder, with a low that night of 47! We boated from the harbor to the starting point, a pebbly, isolated beach. Pilot said let's go, shined a spotlight on the beach, I jumped in and swam to shore, cleared the water, and looked around for a second before the Pilot sounded the horn which was the official start of my solo swim to France.

I quickly got into a nice rhythm, sighting on the boat to my left and just tried to enjoy it for a bit. The hours went by, I stopped for feeds every 30 minutes. The feeds became increasingly difficult, because the currents were so strong, it was like I was in a river, quickly passing the boat. The feed bottles were on a rope and I quickly ran out of rope before I was done feeding (15-20 seconds). I wasn't quite getting the nutrition I needed and we all knew it. Jana and Lisa improvised with my feeds which probably saved the day. But, in the morning hours, before the sun rose, I was having a tough time. The diesel exhaust combined with swallowing salt water eventually disagreed with my stomach to the tipping point. I was "chumming" the water on a few occasions. My legs were dragging, I was feeling the cold (The water temp was around 63 degrees), and my hip joints were extremely painful (from the cold and lack of movement). My stroke rate had dropped from around 60 to below 50. I knew I just had to push through to the sunrise.

When the sun rose, my mood changed. It's not really warmer, but at least I can clearly see what's going on around me. I can see container ships, ferry boats, and most importantly my crew. Also, I can see

France! This is both good and bad as it appears so close, but I know it is still so far. I can see the cliffs and I know I am heading east of the ideal finishing location. This is due to the strong tides that day and my lack of speed during the night. At the next feed, I'm told I need to pick up the pace or I'm not going to finish. The geography of the land is such that if I don't make land by a certain point, the land fades away and the tides push me east back into the middle of the Channel with no possibility of finishing. So, the last hour or two turn into the maximum pace I can muster. Jana and Lisa are cheering me on and it's like I'm swimming a 1650 race at a local swim meet! I have come this far, been given a chance to swim, and I wasn't going to quit now. The boat launched its small zodiac boat to take me to shore and at that point, I knew I was going to make it. The large boat has to stay out due to the shallow waters, so the co-captain in the zodiac guides me into the finishing beach. I initially find a sandy bottom and small waves, then discover medium sized mossy boulders with waves crashing on the beach. I have been in the water for almost 15 hours and my legs aren't exactly working. I slip, land on the rocks, get up, get knocked down again, and again, until I clear the water, stand-up on the sliver of beach on France with a 200 foot tall cliff above me. I realize I'm cut and scraped in about ten spots, but I really could care less. I had made it across the Channel! I grabbed some small stones and placed some sand in a small container, tucked them in my suit, jumped back in the water and swam back to the boat. Total time 14 hours and 59 minutes. I'm super grateful to my crew, Jana, Lisa, and the crew of the boat, the Mighty Mo. It was quite an adventure!