

Warrington Dolphins LDSC – Channel Relay 2004

As part of the 40th Anniversary of the Dolphins, the Club organised a Channel Relay crossing. The six-team members were Andy Wright, Claire Dickinson, Alan Pomfret, Nicola Wright, Phil Taylor and Joe Coy, with Channel swimmer Chris Carter as Team Manager. The team travelled to Dover on the night of Monday 19th July 2004 to meet up their pilot at 9:00am on Tuesday 20th July 2004. With the prospect of good weather for the day, the team boarded the pilot boat, 'Ocean Breeze' and set off from the marina to travel the short distance to Shakespeare Beach. The first swimmer was Andy Wright who swam ashore. Upon re-entered the water from the beach at 9:30am the crossing attempt began. Each member of the team would then swim for an hour at a time, one after the other until the crossing was completed. The channel swim presents a number of challenges, such as of the distance, the water temperature, the tides, fatigue and most importantly the continued good weather conditions. All these were to be taken on. After an hour noticeable progress had been made as the current took the team in the direction of Belgium. Claire Dickinson continued the swim for the second hour. Although a very experienced swimmer and ex junior international, this was her first ever sea swim. She quickly settled into the routine. Half way into the swim, she momentarily paused to acknowledge Chris Carters half hour signal.

The third swimmer to take on the challenge was Alan Pomfret again in his first sea swim he continued to reduce the distance to France. For the fourth hour the youngest member of the team by a considerable margin, was sixteen years old Nicola Wright. She entered the water to overcome the fear of never swimming in the sea and the thought of jellyfish. After a few strokes she also settled in to a nice stroke only stopping to pull a facial gesture to her father. Ten minutes before the end of the four hours Team Manager, Chris Carter signed Phil Taylor to prepare for his turn. Phil entered the water to replace Nicola but on the other side of the boat as he breathes on the opposite side.

Chris Carter in addition to organising the team was desperate to join in. With the aid of a mobile phone the Secretary of the Channel Swimming Association (CSA) was contacted to discuss the situation. Even with the paperwork previously forwarded and Chris being a Life Hon. Member and Treasurer of the CSA for fifteen years the Secretary found obstacles to prevent him taking part.

Phil in the mean time continued with his rhythmical stroke making good progress towards the Varne light ship. The light ship continued to approach and at one stage the pilot suggested that we get out paintbrushes because we were getting that close that we could paint it as we passed! Passing it at exactly five hours Joe Coy entered the water to continue. Due to Phil being shielded by the pilot's boat, it was at this point that Phil was surprised to see not only the light ship but also how close we were to it.

Joe now continued, the tide again taking the team back in the direction of Belgium. Joe continued and took the team out of the shipping lane into the separation zone in the middle of the Channel. Alan while Joe was swimming decided to use the time wisely and proceeded to fish off the back of the boat. On the start of the seventh hour Andy went back in. Striding out to make as much progress as possible; all was going well. After thirty-five minutes things changed and Andy found himself in soup of jellyfish, which he

swam through for the next twenty minutes, picking up a couple of stings on the face and legs. The soup thinned out somewhat with Claire continuing for the next 15 minutes in jellyfish also collecting a sting under her arm, before the sea cleared. Alan swam his second stint and he entered the second shipping lane.

From the 'poop deck' Chris Carter reported that France had been sighted. Nicola entered the water for her second hour. This time she immediately settled with her easy style breathing every four strokes she continued as the tide changed again. With the French coast approaching it was estimated that Andy would reach land on his third swim.

Nicola completed her swim and Phil continued with his smooth stroke appearing as if it was his first swim of the relay. 'Ocean Breeze' continued closer to France but the tide was now running away from Calais. As dusk was about to set in, Phil was replaced by Joe who entered the water with a light-stick behind his goggle strap. Closer and closer the team approached France. Andy replaced Joe as night set in. Following the rules he had two-night stick on show, as visibility was very limited. With over 2 miles to go Andy took off at a fast pace at the request of Claire who didn't relish the thought of a third swim which would be at night, which she had never done swam at night before.

With only the interruption of the France fishing boat straying dangerously close to Andy, the hour past leaving a mile left to the shore. However the team were now in a bay away from the tidal flow northwest of Cap Gris Nez. Claire took over the swim to the shore, but found it difficult to maintain her stroke due difficulty in seeing the boat. Land was getting very close and the sound of the waves breaking on the beach could be heard. The time left in the hour reduced and Alan prepared to enter and finish off the swim.

The sonar on the boat now indicated that the bay was getting shallow and the tender was launch with Alan on board to swim the final leg to shore. From 'Ocean Breeze' it could be clearly heard the encouragement by Alan for Claire to speed up as land approached. The relay was completed in exactly fourteen hours - a good time for a first relay crossing.

This was the eighth relay crossing made by the Dolphins and was also the third fastest. A remarkable achievement considering that only one of the team prior to the swim had swum at night and additionally only one had swam in the sea.

Claire and Alan returned to the boat where a bottle of Fizz was opened and the boat turned and motored the 3 hours back with all the team sleeping for most of the way.

Notable points Nicola listened to her entire CD collection (almost twice). Joe Coy slept for 75% of the time on the boat. Chris made several calls on his mobile phone. Three jellyfish stings were collected. No seasickness was experienced. One box of king-size Mars Bars was eaten. Claire is easily re-fuelled by a cup of tea. Phil quietly got on with the event. Photographic evidence from the swim shows that Alan swims with no arms. Nevertheless with no arms he caught a fish while fishing.

Andy Wright



From left to right
Joe Coy, Alan Pomfret, Nicola Wright, Andy Wright, Claire Dickinson, Phil Taylor