

Frank Levy English Channel Race Report:

So much to tell you about. This was a much more technical swim than Catalina, The distance is the same but Catalina is a straight line across with minimal effect from the tide although current is an issue. In the channel it is all about timing and tides, when to start, when to turn, where to be. I was totally dependent on my crew member Tim Denyer and the boat pilot Reg Brickell. These two know the channel better than anyone and were both invaluable for the successful crossing.

For Catalina I could just drift off in my thoughts and swim. In the channel the boat was constantly moving and I had to adjust with it. It meant I had to totally concentrate on the boat and the two times my mind drifted I ended up 50 to 100 meters away with a very concerned crew waiting for me to come back. This was both good and tough. Good in that it took my mind off shoulder pain, how much swim was left, etc. but it was tiring to always have to be on.

The water temperature was 62,2 at the start and warmed to about 63 mid channel. In the French inland waters it was as warm as 66. I felt chilled at times but never cold and never in any danger. However, the feeds were adjusted for the cool water and were mixed between hot and cold.

The feeds were also different and extremely successful. There were basically four types, Gatorade Prime, Ovaltine in water, an English product called endure, and ginger cordials with some gel shots mixed in. I had never tried Enduro which is not available at home but it was a better tasting carbopro. These feeds kept me warm, energized and the variety was a nice touch. They are specific to channel crossing and were developed by a nutritionist in Australia. I can get you her name if you want to look it up. She does other sports but marathon swimming is the closest to what you/we do. All I can say is they worked better than anything I have had for a swim.

The professional I had on the boat, not the pilot but the crew, was a man named Tim Denyer. He did the swim in 2005 and has assisted over 30 swimmers across. He was invaluable and worked incredibly well with the pilot and with me. I was totally confident in the crew I picked and just did as I was told. They are the ones deserving of the credit for the crossing. As it turns out 11 boats went out that morning, we were the last by 2 hours to go, and only 2 of us made it. I think that says so much about my crew's knowledge. It turns out Tim's wife is Leanda Cave's sister. Very small world.

As for the swim. We started around 830 from Samphire Hoe which is a little south of the normal starting point. This was due to the weak neap tide. I was a little cold in the 60 degree air but it helped make the shock of the water much less when I jumped in. I jumped in and swam about 200 yards to shore, got the horn and started swimming. I take a while to warm up and find my rhythm on these and yesterday was no different. Didn't feel great until after the second feed, 1 hour into the swim. They tell you not to look back but I had to and it was breathtaking to see the white cliffs of Dover in the background and the castle. I swam for about 3 hours in British inland waters. Regular feedings, all systems fine. We passed all but one of the other 10 boats that went out that day, all but one 2 hours before we left.

We moved into the first shipping lane and I started to feel fatigue. The entire week I was feeling stressed about the swim, more so than any others. I think a large part was I now know what to expect on a 12 plus hour swim. How it will feel, the ups and downs, etc. It's almost better not to know what is coming. The other issue was whether or not I would even get a

chance to swim. I was 3 on the tide behind a swimmer who completed her triple crossing- the first in 25 years - and another swimmer who went out the first day. The triple swimmer got great conditions, as she deserves but that left me in limbo. I first got a call that I might go Saturday morning so I rushed back to the caravan park I was staying and waited. Didn't go. Then was told possibly Monday morning at 4 but got a call at 10 pm that that was out. There was talk of an overnight swim leaving Monday night but again no dice. At 630 Monday night I was told we were on for 800 the next day. It is still not a sure thing and I know another swimmer who got to the dock and at the last minute they cancelled. Anyway, it played on my psyche and added to the anxiety of the whole thing. Needless to say Monday night was a restless night for me. I think this added to the fatigue.

After the first shipping lane, now almost halfway through we entered the separation zone. No ships but lots of jellies. I spoke to another swimmer earlier who told me they stung but it felt like a sea nettle and went away fast. I got stung by a lion's mane jelly on the face shoulder and chest. It hurt like hell and never went away. I found out pretty quickly that I am NOT allergic to them and in some ways the pain was nice wakeup. This is where things got interesting. We did a lot of moving and headed into the next shipping lane where the pilot was setting up for the most advantageous path to France. After 3 hours again we were in the French inland waters. The wind was picking up but the water was warmer. I forgot to mention the first two hours were choppy but ok, the next three very smooth and then it went from choppy, to lots of waves making breathing tough, to very tough conditions at the very end.

Once in the French inland waters I did what they tell you not to do. I looked at France. It was close and if we headed straight for it maybe 3 miles left. However, if we headed straight for it we would have been pushed far away and not landed for another 6 hours. The chop picked up to its highest and each feed I waited to hear was my last. That never seemed to happen. I didn't know it at the time but they were setting me up to make an attack on the point as soon as the tide shifted but in doing so it seemed like I was swimming away from the point. Within the next feed the water really warmed up and the chop calmed as we had come to a spot protected by the cape against the tide and the wind. That is when I saw Tim jump in and the little dinghy drop in the water. That was the end. It took about 15 minutes to get to the shore, the last 3 navigating through really rocky waters in the dark. I got to dry land, picked up my rocks and headed back to the dinghy which took us to the boat. It was a little anti-climactic in that the finish was such a rocky stretch. Once on the dinghy and then the boat it all started to hit me and it just felt great.

I slept for part of the 2.5 hour trip back to Dover and put on some dry clothes. I had a little shiver but nothing terrible and I didn't feel uncomfortable to any great extent. We got out in Dover, unloaded everything and drove to Varne Ridge where we stayed. Varne Ridge is a caravan park, trailer park that is only rented out to Channel swimmers by a great couple who are incredibly supportive and helpful. As it was after midnight I didn't expect much when we got back but they had raised the American flag on their flag pole signifying that the last successful swimmer was American. When I saw that it all started to hit me. I had just swum the Channel and also am now the 112 person to complete the Marathon Swimming Triple Crown of Manhattan, Catalina, and English Channel. I know it is still sinking in but after being so matter of fact and all business with the swim I really felt good.

Not much sleep that night - too excited and too much caffeine from the late feeds. Woke up the next morning and found out the entire caravan park had been at the local pub watching my tracker and rooting me on. That felt great and was really touching.