

# MY CHANNEL SWIM JOURNEY

## From relay rookie to solo challenger: One swimmer's relentless quest to conquer the Channel.

After completing a Channel relay swim in 2021, one swimmer committed to a gruelling three-year solo training journey under an experienced coach. The challenge demanded intense dedication, personal sacrifice, and even postponing his wedding.

### 2021

I was one of a 5 person team who completed a channel relay swim in 2021. We managed 10 hours 13mins. Afterwards my friend and the team captain Jamie (who has swum the channel solo years ago) kindly agreed to coach me, which is so generous of him!

*He says he wants a 3 year commitment.  
I agree.*

3 years of hard training pass. 3 years of sacrificing financially, socially which even meant delaying Ania's and my wedding by a whole year.

### 2024

You book a week 'slot' years in advance and pray the conditions are A) good enough to be able to swim and B) as good as possible.

This is what my boat pilots Harry and Fred are for. To keep me safe in one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. To keep me on the best 'line' I can take giving me the best chance of getting to France as possible.

*Years of training done, cumulating in  
a 9 hour sea swim at Budleigh in force  
4-7 winds.*



## 2nd September

The week before my channel swim window opens, 10-15th September.

The long range weather forecast is not good. Upsetting as I've seen some beautiful conditions over the last 3 years

*Don't worry about what you can't control.*

## Thursday morning 5th September

My boat pilot, Harry, (who will take me across) messages:

*"can anyone swim this weekend?"*

The weather conditions are not looking good all of next week...

A mad rush of messages to my fiancée Ania, my dad Mark and my coach Jamie – who can do this weekend?...

*Saturday, we can do Saturday.*

I reply to Harry – Saturday 7th Sep is possible. A mad rush - Sports massage, food shopping, packing.

## Friday 6th September

8am, Harry says

*"tomorrow may be a go, I'll call soon".*

Will we go or not?

9am, Harry

*"no 100% guarantee, but is tomorrow is likely, you'd better come up in case, welcome to the 'Dover-coaster' - buckle up".*

## Let's go!

Frantic final packing, making of flapjack, sorting feeds out, dad coming up from Cornwall to Exeter, Ania coming back from work. Jamie will meet us in Dover.

11am, leave Exeter for Dover!

What follows is a 8 hour car journey with 2 road closures, 3 accidents, 4 sets of roadworks...

What normally takes about 4.5 hours took 8 hours!

All eating into my possible sleep time in Dover before my Channel swim. I only manage a few hours of broken sleep in the car.

6pm, Harry on the phone with the final confirmation

*"1am tomorrow, we're on"....*

I can't quite believe it, I'm going to start swimming the English channel in 7 hour's time! I didn't think I'd be swimming it until Tuesday-Saturday next week!

We arrive in Dover 6.30pm, eat, check in, 2 hours sleep.

10.30pm alarm... Final prep. I'm going to be on the boat travelling from Folkestone harbour to Samphire Hoe in 2 hours. Nerves are increasing. Stay calm Nye.

11.30pm leave Dover for Folkestone harbour, boarding the boat in about 30 minutes. Half way there – ANOTHER ROAD CLOSURE! *"You have got to be f\*\*\*\*\* kidding me. Stay calm. Breath."*

Imagine, you're about to get on a boat a swim at night, and start this challenge that you've been training for 3 years for, and you're at risk or not even getting there. The entire journey seemed to conspire to ensure we wouldn't even get to the start line.

Jamie and dad get us all to Folkestone in time.

*Just. Breath... Focus...*

Harry takes us in a row boat onto their main boat 'Masterpiece' that will accompany me to France and keep me safe.





It's a 20 minute boat journey on 'Masterpiece' to Samphire Hoe, the beach where I start my swim. The last 10 minutes of the boat journey is spent having Vaseline smeared all over me which will stop the chafing, and final preparations.

*My heart rate is rising. Ania writes with a marker pen. 'family' on my left hand and 'Ania' on the right.*

I'm nervous, that voice on my shoulder says

*"you've only had 5 hours sleep, most in a cramped car".*

I silence it.

*"I'm ready, I've prepared".*

A few photos, hugs from Jamie and Dad, and a hug and a kiss from Ania, and into the gloomy water I go.

The time is approximately 1am in the morning...

I swim from the boat to the beach with a spotlight to help me see where it is. I come out the water. Breathe.... and give a thumbs up, the klaxon horn goes and OFF WE GO! My swim has officially started.

## Hour 0-1

The water is cool but not cold, I feel nervous but excited and ready for the challenge ahead.

Focus on the breath, glide, get your rhythm despite the turbulent currents.

I swim back to the boat where I then try and swim alongside it about 10 feet away.

Then disaster...

***I CAN BARELY SEE!***

I can't hear a thing

And then... "STOP" - I almost swim into the boat! My crew scream at me.

I veer off 90 degrees immediately.

What's happening? It's pitch black everywhere apart

from a vague light on the boat.

My goggles have steamed up almost entirely...

With the waves and my steamed up goggles I veer too far away and so close I almost hit the boat many times.

NO, how can this happen? This has never happened. Why NOW when it matter the most?

I realise, I washed my goggles in the sink back at the hotel to rinse away the anti-fog. Usually I gently swish my goggles around on the shore before I get in, the strong tap must've washed away the anti-fog this time.

***"F\*\*\* I've done myself"***

I'm literally 5 minutes into my swim.

My left hamstring feels like it wants to cramp already as I'm having to rotate more than normal to give myself more time to try and see where the boat is.

Terrible thoughts creep in.

Then I remember what my friend Sian (channel swimmer, north channel swimmer and GB ice swimming swimmer) told me. "Something WILL happen on the big day that you haven't prepared for."

I smiled, "this is the bastard, this is the unforeseen variable".

I also remember what the greatest open water swimmer in the world (IMO) said in her blog about her record breaking 2-way North channel swim, Sarah Thomas (who has swam the channel 4 times BACK TO BACK IN ONE GO).

In her blog Sarah said "my coach and I promised each other, we don't make decisions in the dark".

I wanted to quit there and then. Less than one hour in.

I promised myself I would swim for 5 hours until the sun came up, and take it from there.

The conditions weren't terribly wavy, but it was still wavy, and the waves were very turbulent, multidirectional and awkward. These were NOT the conditions a channel swimmer wants to start in..

They didn't improve either, but my mind was set.



## Hour 1-2

Having decided my plan I get into a rhythm, I realise if I swim further away from the boat, I can just about see it. The crew also put glowsticks on the side which really helped. I could see silhouettes on the boat.

I come in for my feeds (where you get a carb drink every 30mins and flapjack or Jelly every hour for energy). My crew have also started to use a different bottle that I don't have to unscrew.

I'm still not happy with the situation but I feel more in control.

Let's hit the pace hard as was my plan for the first 3-4 hours. This is to try and punch out into the channel before the tide turns.

## Hour 2-4

I hold a strong pace. My hamstrings are holding up.

Time is being wasted drifting too far away from the boat and too close, but I keep going.

Each 30 minute feed I think 'I'm closer to the sun coming up, I might be able to see then'.

## Hour 4-5

Light starts coming from the horizon.

Although that is to my left, and I'm breathing to my right to see the boat. My morale is rising.

I start seeing at last!

*Maybe. Just maybe I can do this.*

## Hour 5-6

Assuming I can still do a 10 hour swim, I am now into the 3rd quarter.

Any event you do the 3rd quarter is psychologically the hardest. You're tired and yet you have a long way to go!

It's now light and I don't have to worry every breath where the f\*\*\*\*\* boat is.

Here we go baby! I actually start enjoying myself.

## Hour 6-7

This is where it starts hurting. My shoulders are sore, my hamstrings and hips are sore. My left shoulder and back are getting painful.

Merry Christmas MF\*\*\*\*\* (Goggins quote). Here we go.

Ania holds up a sign: 'Jupiter' - a private joke with a good friend re: David Goggins.

Just what I needed to see.



The crew point out to sea and I breath to my left seeing massive tankers, ferries and container ships.

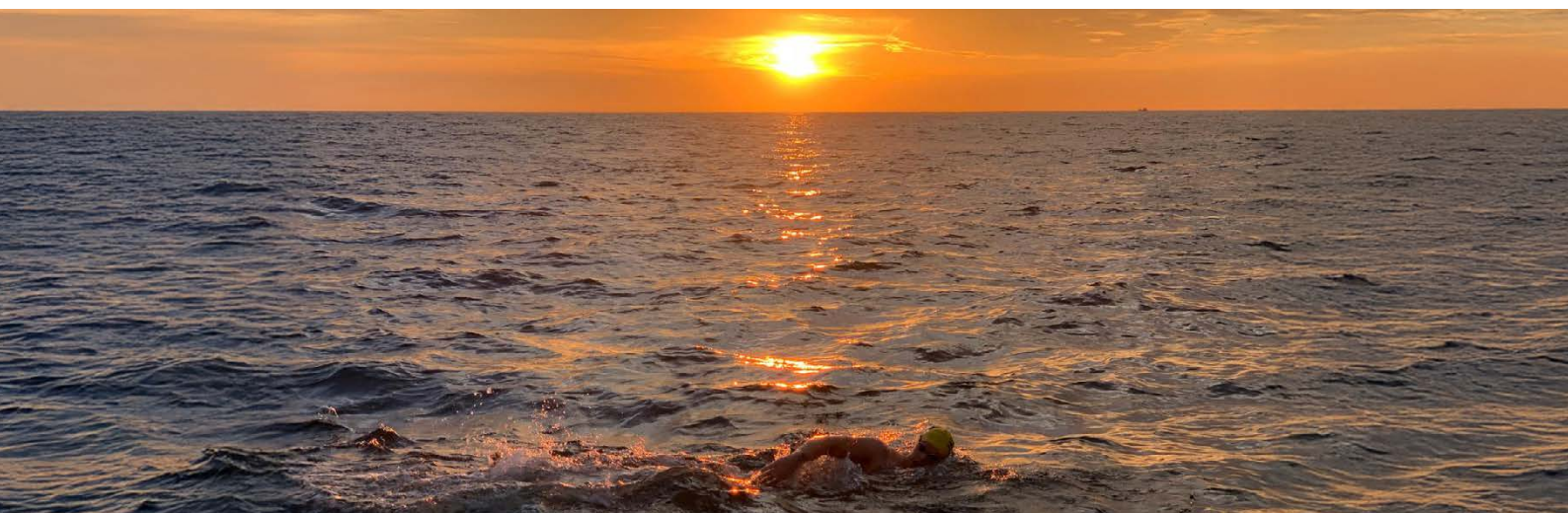
*I don't give a s\*\*\*. I want my 10 hours.*

## Hour 7-8

The conditions calm around 7.5 hours in. I start cranking up the pace, taking deeper breaths and preparing my mind for the pain

Another sign being held up, 'Find a way'.

Find a way Nye, find a way.





I see my crew taking photos, watching me, showing me signs '30 minutes until feed', '5 minutes until feed', 'Feed'. We have a solid routine going now.

I knew I had lost a lot of time taking my goggles off on feeds so I could see, and because I drifted close and far away from the boat. My feeds weren't quick enough.

## Hour 8-9

I still hadn't even looking forwards for France, it just messes with your mind. You think you're close but you might still have many hours to go. I had been warned by Channel swimming friends about this and followed their advice.

My body hurts, my left shoulder and rhomboid are agony.

I see another sign 'You can either suffer the pain of discipline, or the pain of regret – Jim Rohn'.

*I will not fail.*

Every time I look at the boat my dad Mark was there watching me. Making sure I'm safe, making sure I don't veer into the boat and possibly disqualify myself. He was my rock.

Ania and Jamie too, but they had feeds to sort out, photos and video's to take and updates to all of you amazing people staying up, tuning in and giving me support – THANK YOU ALL.

Every feed and time I saw my crew gave me a boost.

I pushed through the pain.

## Hour 9-10

I finally dare to look forward and see France fairly close.

But not close enough...

*I'm broken...I wanted 10 hours.*

I wanted 10 hours so, so badly. I swam 30k last summer in 9hours 4mins (in perfect conditions). I know the conditions haven't been great, but how can I be this far behind?

How can I be behind so many channel swimmers I know I'm faster than?

*Ego is a dangerous thing.  
It nearly broke me.*

For the second time in the swim I feel broken.

My chest was painful, my head was tingling like it does when my Multiple Sclerosis flexes its muscles and makes itself known.

I worried. Will I pass out?

I remember my promise to myself before the swim "There's only 2 ways I'm getting out this water, when I get to France, or if I'm dragged out unconscious "

I swim as hard as I can without risking cramp.

## Hour 10-11

I've been swimming as hard as I dare for the last 4 hours. I know I'm making good ground and I'm being pushed to France.

But I'm so, so tired.

My googles start steaming up again.

For the first time I show my frustration to Jamie "Roughly how far left? Will it be a 13 or 14hr swim? I need to know as I'll need to slow down if that's the case".

Jamie replies

*"you're smashing it. 1 Hour left".*

1 hour. "f\*\*\*" I'm so far behind what I wanted.

I promised myself I'd give this swim my everything. I can't stop now. Not with this team helping me, not with all the money WE all have raised for the MS Centre, not with all the sacrifice not only I, but Ania has had to sacrifice.

But the worst was still to come...



## Final hour

My lungs are screaming at me. My triceps have blown up. My hips are painful and my shoulders and left Rhomboid are in agony. I'm giving it my everything.

Final feed, I ask: "Jamie I can't see again, I can't even see where I'm aiming for on the shore, How far left".

"Just follow the boat, 1 kilometre" Jamie replies.

1 kilometre, okay.



Another sign 'just Flop Flap and it'll take you a bit longer' – another private joke.

The current was so strong. I swim as hard as I can for the boat as I can just about see it.

I'm barely moving.

I can only see the outline of the shore. It isn't getting any closer!

Am I 300m away? 500m away? 800m away?

For the first time in the swim I panic. I honestly don't know if I'm going to make it. I'm nearly in tears.

I was so, so close to just stopping and letting the current take me sideways.

*NO.*

NO I can't fail now. I can't fail myself. I can't fail Ania, I can't fail my family. I can't fail everyone who sponsored me.

I remember the promise to myself. I either get to France or get dragged out unconscious.

A final make shift sign

*'70k money raised'!*

I get a grip of myself and give EVERYTHING I had left.

My open water swimming experience told me that I need to forget off-setting the current and just try and push in closer to shore, just enough that the current gets weaker and I don't get swept past the next headland.

I see the boat coming back to England from a three person relay team that has just finished and we give each other a wave.

Just get a few hundred metres closer.

Then I just about see the little dingy being lowered from 'Masterpiece' into the water. I can't see the shore well. I use the dingy as a reference point. We're both being swept sideways at incredible speed.

*I'm getting closer!*

I shout to Harry and Ania on the dingy "where do I land". Harry replies "See that big square stone.. There".

I sprint with the dregs of energy I have left. I'm going to make it!

I see the sand and rocks. I swim until my feet touch the sand.

I sprint out until I'm completely clear of the water as per the rules.

I Turn around, then the sound of the klaxon once more...

I've done it! We've done it! Then I collapse on the beach for a minute.

Nothing left. Nothing.

*I finish the swim 12:51 hours.*





I slowly swim back to the dingy. Harry helps me in. I give Ania a hug. Harry points to shore at a familiar face for many channel swimmers – Patrice, who kindly greets swimmers and had been congratulating me! I wave and shout thank you to “Patrice.

We get back to ‘Masterpiece’. I give my dad a hug. I give, Jamie a hug. I shake Fred, Harry and the official observer Alex’s hands.

I sit down. It’s done. I stare out into the channel.

*A bitter – sweet moment...  
A few tears.*

I wanted that 10 hours so badly. I know I had it there if the conditions were perfect. Alas, conditions were far from perfect.

Still, I was able to swim and complete a lifelong dream!

Fred and Harry offered all the swimmers an opportunity to go early due to the uncertainty in the forecast for our window (10-15th September).

I reflected. WE DID IT! It may not have been the time I wanted, but ultimately we succeeded and I overcame many obstacles and can honestly say I gave it my very best. I had nothing more to give.

*I’m genuinely happy.*

We spent 3 hours coming back to Folkestone on the boat.

I then had to do a surprise drug test by the Channel swimming Association. Only approximately 10% of swimmers get chosen. Lucky me.

No problems there – all clear!

Back to Dover for some food and a rest!

## Mission accomplished!

Despite the fact that the whole weekend was rushed, the preparation was suboptimal to say the least, the logistics and journey threatened to jeopardise the swim, almost half my swim was at night, I got barely any sleep (which makes even more difference if you have MS) We did it!.

So many emotions, the main ones;

*Relief, Gratitude, Pride*

Harry and Fred nailed it. I will forever be grateful that they went the extra mile to help me just get to the start line.

At the time of writing this. Due to the current weather conditions, and me being swimmer 2/4 of the swim window, I probably wouldn’t have even had the opportunity to even swim!

*No one has swum so far this week....*

**A huge thank you to everyone who helped make my swim possible – it really was a team effort - and to all those who have donated to the fundraising. £13,100 raised!**

**Thank you for reading my story!**

*Nye*

