

PUT FEAR ASIDE

Five beginner swimmers and their swim coach took on the 70km length of Lake Geneva. **Lorraine Candy** of Team Swim&Tonic reports

SWIMMING OUT OF THE
DARKNESS AND INTO THE
SUNSHINE OF A NEW DAY



Swimming out of the darkness and into the sunshine of a new day will forever be one of my most treasured memories. If you had told me that six months ago, I would have laughed in your face.

"There's no way you'll find me doing front crawl in a Swiss lake in the middle of night," I would have said. But there I was watching a fiery dawn explode across the Alps every time I took a breath. Gliding beside me was the Imagine, a beautiful yacht leading myself and the five other members of Team Swim&Tonic 70km across Lake Geneva, or Lac Lemman as locals call it.

As the sun came up at 5.52am

I was on my fourth swim of five during our relay, which had started at 8.52am

the previous day from the beach below Chateau Crillon, in Villeneuve. With every stroke I was snapshotting a moment which would define our extraordinary adventure. For me this is what open water swimming is all about: having fun and experiencing life out of your comfort zone in a place you would never normally visit.

FIVE BEGINNERS AND DAN

Our team consisted of myself, aged 49, Dan Bullock, 47, Katy Orr, 48, Dipah Shah, 43, Lisa Potter-Dixon, 34, and 16-year-old swimming star Elsa Pahl, our only breaststroke swimmer.

It had taken the six of us (five beginners and our patient swim coach Dan of SwimforTri) six months to train for this once-in-lifetime swim

organised by Ben Barnham of the Lake Geneva Swimming Association and sponsored by Tudor Watches.

As amateur swimmers with 13 children between us and fulltime jobs to accommodate we weren't aiming for records or personal bests, what we wanted to do was something few people had done before. Only six solo swimmers and six relay teams have swum the lake.

We had only done a handful of short open water events between us and had no night swimming experience so this was a challenge (it's twice the length of the Channel) – but we did it!

EYE OF THE TIGER

We put fastest first and Dan kicked off as we blasted Eye of the Tiger across the lake to keep the mood positive. We wanted to get a good distance in at the beginning and he managed 4km. We were incredibly lucky with the



LEFT TO RIGHT:
Dipa, Lorraine, Dan,
Elsa, Lisa and Kate
celebrate their success



KATE SAW A
SHOOTING STAR
DURING HER SWIM
AND EMERGED FROM
THE WATER WITH A
HUGE SMILE ON
HER FACE



← weather, it stayed around 26 to 28 degrees air temperature for both Monday and Tuesday, meaning we warmed up quickly after each swim. The water temperature reached 20 degrees at its highest but we often hit cold patches where the icy flow of mountain rivers joined the lake. We encountered a few 'pocket ocean' conditions caused by nearby large boats or a change of wind conditions.

Our swim was monitored by an official adjudicator, a lifeguard and two pilots. We each went in from the back of the boat for an hour, agreeing beforehand that we'd give 30-minute then 'five minutes to go' time warnings. We used glittery blue pom-poms to do this, which was a first for such an official swim. This may have annoyed our serious minded adjudicator but it kept team morale high. Between swims we stretched, warmed up, listened to music and ate small meals. I think we all got around three separate hours sleep in total. We ate less food than we had brought, mostly noodles or rice from the microwave, nuts, bananas with some treats thrown in (I had four chocolate Curly Wurlies!).

Team spirit kept everyone going, with continual encouragement for the person in the water and for the one going in next. We didn't measure our swims, it really wasn't the point for us, though Dan as a professional kept a record of his and he covered most distance in the least time. I estimate that, Dan aside, each of us swam between 2.3km and 3km an hour.

The first swim and then the night swim proved to be the swims that got the tummy churning most. Elsa was first in during the pitch black but calmly got on with it like a pro, wearing her green night lights on her cap and cossie. And if you've never done a night swim I would heartily recommend it. You have to put fear aside and have a mantra (mine is "I am at ease") which fits to your stroke pattern. I counted 100 strokes and then began to enjoy the most amazing feeling of gliding through the inky water, ignoring the drop in temperature and watching the stars above instead. Kate saw a shooting star during her swim and emerged from the water with a huge smile on her face.



COACH'S VIEW

Dan Bullock

The lure of a long swim had been hanging over me for many years. The idea of the Channel however, not so much.

With its tough currents, temperatures and tricky departure windows due to the weather and tough acclimatisation, the Channel has always just been too much of an organisational nightmare. The chance to swim a relay the length of Lake Geneva at 70km had other challenges but appealed as it was slightly easier to prepare for and enter. Endurance and lack of sleep being the key issues.

Seventy kilometres is big, so big I had try to put it out of my mind, but as you sit on the train for 90 minutes travelling from Geneva along the edge of the lake around to Villeneuve it is hard to ignore. I was the swimmer in our team of six. Lorraine, Kate, Elsa, Dipa and Lisa are all keen swimmers but I had the swimming background and I was trying hard not to show my nerves for fear of worrying them. I was first off the beach and wanted to get a good start to build some momentum.

The stars were out for my 3am swim and it was pretty. But it was also a cold part of the lake and after a two-hour nap I was not at my best. Worries of swimming into something or being brushed by a weed were also nagging doubts. All day I had been watching the lake and had to admit problems were unlikely. I had hardly seen a twig or leaf in the water all day. The water in Lake Geneva is some of the best I have ever swum in.

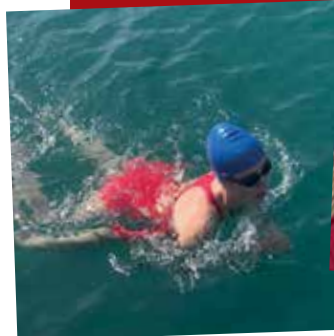
The last few km into the finish were, as promised, the hardest: it was late afternoon, the wind was up, the boats were out and despite the great earlier conditions the lake was not going to give this to us easily. Finally, it was like being in the sea with good waves and swell to contend with. The team were amazing and followed me in for the last 300m onto the shore where our official observer took our time.

As a former swimmer I had all the skills to accomplish this. I once swam 16km in a single winter training session at Ohio University. The others in the team not only had to deal with the cold, the dark and the distance but also work on swim technique and efficiency during busy work lives. I take my swim hat off to them. Well done Lisa, Elsa, Kate, Dipa and Lorraine.

TEAM SWIM&TONIC

raised £3,750 for the charity Level Water which helps children with disabilities receive one-to-one swimming lessons.

For more information on entering the swim contact the Lake Geneva Swimming Association:
lakegenevaswimmingassociation.com



Lorraine sporting a dolphin hat on board the Imagine

WHAT NEXT?

As the sun rose we estimated we had one or possibly two swims left. We hoped we would only need to do five each but a quick calculation during our group yoga stretch on deck at 9am looked like some might have to do a sixth swim. "Speed it up Dan," we all chimed cheerily!

We knuckled down on our next two swims and before we knew it Geneva's famous Jet D'eau fountain was in our eyeline.

Only one person would have to do a sixth swim and the rota showed we were lucky... it was Dan! As he dropped in outside the busy harbour where the current was more powerful and a keen wind whipped around the yacht we were grateful he was the swimmer who would realise the finale of our dream.

I cannot explain the joy, elation and tearful emotions we felt as we all swam the last 200 metres behind Dan towards the small city beach in the sunshine at 3.30pm on Tuesday 18 July 2017.

We had finished in respectable 30 hours and 38 minutes. And as we enjoyed a beer back on the Imagine half an hour later one question was on everyone's mind: what next?