

NEPEAN AQUATIC CENTRE SWIM CLUB MEMBERS MICHAEL PAYNE & STEVE PAYNE TRAVEL TO THE UNITED KINGDOM TO SWIM THE ENGLISH CHANNEL AS PART OF A THREE MAN TEAM #WHATEVER...

Refer : Hawkesbury Gazette article published Wednesday, August 14 2019.

Background

What makes the English Channel such a Challenging Swim ??

The English Channel is a unique and demanding swim and due to the variable conditions of wind and wave height, it is considered to be one of the ultimate long distance challenges. Water temperature during July to September ranges from 14 to 18 degrees Celsius however, can drop to 6 degrees overnight. July to September is considered the better time of year for swimming the channel. Jellyfish, seaweed and floating debris are likely obstacles as it is actually one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world catering to tankers; ferries; seacats and other marine vessels.

The sea conditions can change very quickly with little warning. Pilots are engaged as they have considerable knowledge of the local waters and are in a position to advise swimming teams of when to take to the water for a reasonable chance of a successful swim without placing any person at unnecessary risk. The Pilot will retain the right to stop the swim if they consider it inadvisable or unsafe to continue.

The swim is approximately 32 kilometres from the shores near Dover in UK to Calais in France.

What Rules apply to an Attempt to Swim the English Channel ??

All attempts to swim across the English Channel must be applied for and approved well in advance of an attempt.

No person in an attempt to swim the Channel can be assisted by an artificial aid of any kind, but is permitted to grease the body before a swim, use goggles, wear one cap that does not offer thermal protection or buoyancy; nose clip, ear plugs and one standard swim costume of a material not offering thermal protection or buoyancy. A standard costume is to be sleeveless and legless –no wetsuit swims are recognized. When swimming in the dark, the swimmer must wear at least 2 light sticks and these are usually attached to the front and back of the cap.

Relay Teams may consist of two persons, or more and teams are classified according to the number of team members. A boat is engaged by each team to carry supplies and an Observer. Each swimmer must swim for one hour each time that they enter the water. On receipt of a time signal, a take-over must be made within five minutes of the ending of the preceding swimmer's leg and the new swimmer is to swim up from behind the preceding swimmer. Team members must rotate in the same order throughout the swim.

The appointed Observer is in sole charge of the timing of the swim and is responsible for observing all compliance with the rules.

Every application for recognition of a swim must be accompanied by the Pilot's chart positions and by the Observer's Report, recording incidents, time, tides, method of feeding, etc. Upon completion of the channel swim, an official letter of acknowledgement will be issued once the swim has been ratified. A complete archive of all successful crossings are referenced.

Michael Payne / Steve Payne – Preparing for the English Channel Swim Crossing in July 2019

Michael continued training in the development and distance squads at NAC following his successful 2.5kml open water JX swim in Adelaide in January and 1kml & 2 kml Manly Cole Classic efforts in February. Steve was having to contend with limited solo swim efforts due to his recovery from consecutive shoulder surgery.

On Sunday, 12 May, the duo qualified for the English Channel swim by completing a 2hour swim in the river at Penrith where Michael covered 7.5kml in 16degree water. Regatta morning dips at 15 degrees water temperature became the norm until June when the real chill hit and 12 degrees wiped the smiles off their faces upon entry. There was purpose to their pain and the duo kept up their paces with twice weekly distance open water encounters until an icy wind reminded them of what was in store as it blew continuously during their last Wollongong Harbour swim on Sunday, 23rd June. Practising sighting ; swimming without goggles and in the dark were tasks that required tweaking over the next 2 weeks before jumping on a plane with support crew ,wife and mother, Jenni.

The father and son combination were to travel to the UK where they would stay in Cork, Northern Ireland UK–attending the Lee Swim 9 day Clinic & in the company of approximately 80 seasoned marathon swimmers including Stephen Redmond who was the first person to successfully complete the Ocean Seven (Seven channel swims around the world that represent some of the most daunting challenges on the planet Each of the swims exceed 10kml, and comes with unique challenges that make each attempt both dangerous and rewarding).

The clinic and ocean swims have been run over the past 9 years by Ned Denison, a highly accomplished US marathon swimmer now living in Northern Ireland. It is one of Michael’s goals to return to participate in the clinic again and compete in the “Champion of Champions” a challenge of 3 consecutive swims of varying distance between 2klms & 8klms. Unfortunately, he was unable to register for the event this year as entries were limited with no late entries permitted.

Michael relished the atmosphere of the clinic and competed extremely well in mixed company. He smashed out many 5kml efforts in the very cold water and on 10th July, completed his first 10.5kml ocean swim where he placed 3rd overall. During the week, Michael covered a massive 65.6kml. He and Steve both placed 4th in their respective age groups of the Vibes & Scribes Lee Swim which was extremely commendable in their elite competition.





Following completion of their clinic commitments, the duo were scheduled to meet up with the third member of their channel crossing team. Long time swim colleague and lover of the open water, Geoff Evans (Penrith) had continued his training at Atmosphere before flying from Australia with his wife, Annette. The group travelled to Dover UK for their final team preparation toward the Channel 3 Man Team Swim.

Team : #WHATEVER –Australia

Team Members –Michael Payne 16 years NACSC; Steve Payne NACSC; Geoff Evans PENRITH.

Team Support Crew – Jenni Payne & Annette Evans

Boat : Optimist – Boat Pilot : Paul Foreman.

Upon arriving in Dover, the team were greeted with the news that they had 2 chances of a swim. One at midnight on Thursday, 18th July and one at 2:00am on Sunday, 21st July. Team members were excited however, weather conditions were very changeable at the time and the chances of a swim were looking very limited. A crossing attempt was foiled on the 18th as it was not considered to be safe risk.

The team were instructed to take to the water for an early morning “dark” swim at 2:00am on Friday, 19th July where they rotated during a 4 hour cold water swim before retiring for a short rest. Unfortunately, upon returning to Dover Harbour, the team were informed that the swim was to be cancelled due to very strong winds that had not been predicted. Disappointing news when everything had been proceeding positively up to this point.

Conditions actually improved and the team were urgently contacted and informed that if they returned to the wharf, they would be given the go ahead for a start. Although conditions were not perfect, this was their only likely chance so they decided to accept the challenge.

Michael commenced the swim from Samphire Hoe UK at 4:48am in the dark and in sea conditions that were far from optimal. During the 12 hours and 29 minutes that ensued, the team swam in continual 1 hour changeovers from Michael to Geoff to Steve. There were strong winds and a large swell prevalent with rain and sun in varying degrees challenging the swimmers. Michael swam the finishing leg into Wissant, France, having swum 5 times with the other 2 team members swimming 4 times each over the journey. The team claimed a successful English Channel crossing swim in a very respectable time.

All team members were ecstatic with their individual efforts and team performance. They each pulled up well from this exhausting outing and earned themselves some relaxing recovery time.



Having returned to Sydney and the realisation of his accomplishments over the prior month, Michael has held further discussions with jb and has already embarked on training for his next ocean challenge. There is no stopping him now – He is hooked!! Michael recounted his channel swim to the squad members who attended the last squad breakfast at the Nutrition Station and informed them that he met some interesting people from various continents with remarkable stories to tell and this has influenced his desire to challenge himself further. He has set his sights on becoming the youngest Australian to successfully negotiate the “Oceans Seven”.

~Congratulations Michael & Steve on your amazing achievement and good luck with your preparation towards your next proposed challenge...

