

Swim Report by Robert Hamilton, Vigour Events

Well Done Phia ! Completed her swim of Loch Awe in 18 hours and 8 minutes
Amazing Achievement!!

Loch Awe is the longest freshwater loch/lake in the United Kingdom when measured from the head of the loch in Torran Bay "along the central axis to the exit of the river Awe, in the Pass of Brander", which made it almost 25.5 miles (41.04km) in length in 1868 when the Admiralty did its original measurements. This was confirmed in 1871 by the Ordnance Survey and again in 1902 by *the famous Bathymetrical Survey of the Fresh-Water Lochs of Scotland, 1897-1909* (<http://maps.nls.uk/bathymetric/>). *When Awe is measured from the head of the loch in Torran Bay along the central axis "to the entrance of the river Orchy, the length exceeds 24 miles [38.6km], and is near equal to the length of Loch Ness". (Quotes taken from pp. 270-1 from the Bathymetrical Survey of the Fresh-Water Lochs of Scotland, 1897-1909, Vol 2, Part 2)*

What does this all mean for this swim? When we realised in June that the official BLDSA recognised the route from Torran Bay until right under the railway bridge past Kilchurn Castle was unswimmable most of the year, either because water levels did not even reach knee height, or the currents and eddies of the river in flood made the final 700m too dangerous, we returned to our research on Awe's ecology. We finally got round to reading the text that accompanied the famous maps produced by the Bathymetrical Survey in the 1900s; the latter we've been using for a while to plot a swim route online. Discovering that Awe owes its status as longest loch in the UK not by following the BLDSA route, but by turning West to swim along the Pass of Brander to what is today called the Awe Barrage of course made us very interested in exploring this route. Finding the end point of this route at a fixed line of buoys about 20m from the Awe Barrage safe in comparison to the endpoint of the BLDSA route was the clincher. The massive support we received from all those interested parties along this proposed new swim route, from the owners and operators of the Cruachan Power Station, the fish farm, to Lochwatch Loch Awe, were tremendous and merely strengthened our resolve.

Our intention has always been to swim the length of Loch Awe, and to ensure that our swim is safe from beginning to end – all swimmers owe it to those who follow in their stead not to make reckless decisions on swim routes, especially those that have the potential to become popular such as Awe. Therefore our route starts, like that of the BLDSA, in the head of loch at Torran Bay; it continues up its central axis to Inishail Island where the route bears west, to continue along the Pass of Brander, up to the fixed line of white buoys right in front of the Awe Barrage which marks the end. This new swim route requires roughly 39km (24.23 miles) of actual swimming, making it about 1-3km longer than the BLDSA route.