

7<sup>th</sup> April 2017

**Report by: Howard James**

The arrangement was for 8 invited swimmers to meet at 05:45 am at Dover Marina car park.

After a short briefing explaining change over procedures. And welcoming & thanking Matt Culverville, Redy Redfurn, Rory Fitzgerald, Clare Hansell, Jeremy Irvine, Phia Steyn, Pip Barry & Annette Stewart, for agreeing at short notice to participate in A WORLD FIRST, 'A NEW DAWN IS RISING', Relay Swim Across the English Channel in April.

An idea I came up with late February and with Andy King (pilot of my 3 solos) agreed, we could put it together safely & have a good attempt.

With temperatures at first thought to be less than 10 degrees Celsius, we spoke about swimmers swimming for 10-15 minutes, but later agreed on no more than 20 minutes.

I became aware that the temperature was rising and potentially swimmers would probably be able to swim longer. However, the swim was an early one and could potentially make us look careless, so we stuck to an 8-person relay, swimming 20 minutes each.

As I was out of the traditional remit of a 6-person relay, 1 hour each, it fell out of ratification from the Channel Swimming Association so we decided on CCA, that allows swims with a difference, although it does not get recognised by the CSA or CSPF.

To me, all I wanted was to open the gate and prove an early swim can be done, plus raise awareness and hopefully raise funds for The Alexa Trust.

Matt Culverville started the swim. I chose Matt to start as he was the only one who was new to channel swimming as a Parliament Hill resident, not a newbie to cold water. I felt it was fair to give him the pressure to start us off; he said it was no pressure.

With another record in our sight and several hot air balloons descending over the white cliffs of Dover, it felt like a great omen.

The water temperature was reading around 8.8 degrees Celsius now, with reasonable wind and a bit of a chop.

At 20 minutes Redy Redfurn jumped in from port side whilst Matt took to the stern to exit the water. As soon as one leg over side was on deck, Redy was shouted at to swim on. This was the procedure agreed for change over.

Rory next, chomping at the bit, "is he on, is he on", "yes Rory", go go, Rory progressed forward in Rory fashion you have all become known to.

Clare Hansell a Kingsdown Crawler, who has swum two consecutive winters nonstop, who was extremely excited jumped in with a yelp and took us 20 minutes further.

Jeremy Irvine dived in later to be told not to do so again. With a consistent stroke, we continued to our first goal, the South West Shipping Lane.

Phia Steyn a South African living in Scotland who took to drive the length of the UK to participate in A New Dawn Is Rising, jumped in "bliksem". An Afrikaans sentiment and did us all proud.

Pip Barry always with a story to tell and entertain, not new to cold water, decided he would swim starboard side. Louise Jane has no problem with a swimmer preference. At starboard side the pilot James King can keep an easy eye on, and port side a camera able to constantly keep a watchful eye. Pip was keen and eager to get going, whilst having fun, deciding on which outrageous costume to wear next.

Annette Stewart, relay after relay, Annette was good for the day's adventure. Extremely happy to be part of this world first.

At 2 hours 20 minutes we were 2.4 miles of the South-West shipping lane. At 3 hours 22 minutes Redy took us into the SW lane.

We were averaging 2 knots an hour and agreed possibly a 13-hour swim.

This was James Kings first pilot crossing without his father Andy King. Eric Hartley was onboard only to share advice if needed. Mainly Eric was on the stern of the boat helping swimmers exit the water. Crew man Andy was a great help in making sure all swimmers, including myself were giving hot drinks after exit.

At 10:42 am, the coastguard was heard to be requesting ships to alter their courses as Louise Jane had a swimmer in the water. Around this time, the water temperature was 9.8 to 10 degrees Celsius.

There was a good atmosphere onboard and swimmers obliged to having a whiteboard shoved in their hands for a photo.

During Jezzas second swim we joked about pouring fish sauce around him to entice the seagulls.

The sea state was really starting to settle around 11:00 am. At 11:20 am Pip was starting on his second or third pie. "I'm always eating, just can't help it on swims."

A message from Andy, "you are in the South West shipping lane, good track."

12:00 midday and the sea state slight and water temperature 9.2 degrees Celsius, no wind and 1.4 miles from the Separation Zone.

At around 13:00 pm, instead of the usual hand signal, for a 5-minute warning, I took to throwing a bucket of water over swimmers instead. At first it may have been frowned upon, but moral was good and I continued to do so for the rest of the swim. Sometimes cheeky swimmers got 2 buckets.

"10 degrees Celsius, warm enough for a solo", came from the wheel house, remembering my early crossing May 2016. This is April though, I laughed.

At around 14:23 pm, we were just under half way with no wind. Sea state calm and water temperature 9.2 degrees Celsius.

I asked swimmers about what they were thinking, each time entering the water for next swim. "It warrants swearing on entering and a Dry Robe on exit." This was a spot-on comment.

All swimmers were fantastic at giving each other support. When help was needed dressing each other, it was done. The hot water was on a constant boil. If a swimmer was zoning out before entering it was acknowledged and respected, with personal space given. It was great to watch it all happen like clockwork. The team knew and respected what they needed to do.

15:04 pm, 11 degrees Celsius, bath water for some.

The channel seemed busy today or maybe I was just seeing it from a different perspective. Not once did I think, I wished I were swimming. I was having a great time.

15:37 pm, Andy and James believe 2.5 – 3 hours to finish, I kept this quiet, as not to get everyone's hopes up too much. I would ask James questions but try to stay composed. However, you could see Rory in and out of the wheelhouse, he knew what was going on. Pilots are good not to give too much information and you can easily read between the lines and make  $2 + 2 = 5$ .

16:00 pm, water 10.8 degrees Celsius and flat & silky, almost a summers day. Andy on the phone, "it could be sub 12 hours but sssh".

From now on swimmers would get not only a bucket of water, but a whistle every 5 minutes for a 1 minute sprint. This worked throughout my late solo in November, it gave me acknowledgement of half time between feeds and mentally I knew I was working harder and getting cold.

Everyone was rooting for each other and pep talks, "you need to give it your all", "I am, I'm not sure I can do anymore." With reply of course, "you can, there's always something more to give."

The Cap was getting close and we really didn't want to miss it. Now I think many were thinking, "I don't want to be the swimmer who lets the team down."

Not let's get this straight, even if we've missed it, we would've gotten in and not one swimmer should have felt they were not doing enough, you were all superb.

18:09 pm, It was Redy or Rory to finish, water was 11 degrees Celsius. Redy was zoning and getting prepared, he was anxious that we wanted him to finish and that if he didn't, the swim would be a lot longer. Rory swam for 6 minutes after Redy to land us on French rocks, slightly south of being underneath the lighthouse.

11 hours 26 minutes, A WORLD FIRST E/C Relay in April. We all did everything that was needed to follow traditional E/C rules. We may have been 30 seconds out at times with our change overs. Not one touched the boat or swam with aids. This swim was about getting a group of people together, who believe swimming the channel early is possible. A group that I believe open gates, not push boundaries. Not one person was better than the other, the crew and swimmers each played a unique role in a unique swim, all with the same goal.

I am so happy this came together and was successful.

I would like to thank the CSA for sharing event on their Facebook page.

MarineTraffic.com for wishing us luck.

And thank you to all that donated and supported.

Esmari and I thank one and all from the bottom of our hearts.

Please find YouTube video by Louise Jane Charters to get a feel of our day out in the E/C.

**English Channel Swim / A New Dawn Is Rising / Earliest relay Swim New record /07/04/2017 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrC7LrZfpu>**

Who's up for going late?!?

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The Alexa Trust in Association with CCA Louise Jane Charters and H20ward James.



Louise Jane Charter

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