

## Blue Mannas in the English Channel Swim

Wednesday 11:10pm the team (average age 59) of Ray Reynolds, Sue Giles, Deb Bloor, Ken Phillips and Team Leader John Reyburn left Varne Ridge Caravan Park to drive to Dover harbour to start a relay across the English Channel, the culmination of 16 months of training. Alex Galbraith, also a Team member, had withdrawn from the swim a few days before.

Our pilot boat was the "Sea Venture II" skippered by Ray Cooper. Also on board was the amicable Peter Wood, official Channel Swim Association Observer, and Ray's brother-in-law Bob as crewman. We sailed to Samphire Hoe, a few kilometres south of Dover to the swim start. Our



John Reyburn, Deborah Bloor, Ray Reynolds, Sue Giles, Ken Phillips before the swim.

first swimmer, Ray Reynolds, with a green light attached to his bathers and another to his goggle strap, swam to the beach using a spotlight from the boat to see where he was going. He clambered out of the water onto the pebble beach (shoving a handful of pebbles into a plastic bag tucked in his bathers for souvenirs), waved his readiness to swim and at the sound of the boat's hooter the swim started at 1:25 Thursday morning, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

The Rules of the CSA state that each swimmer is to swim for one hour, with only a cap and legless bathers and the swimmers must remain in the order as stated on commencement. In our case it was Ray, followed by Ken, then Deb, Sue and John.

Ray, Ken and Deb each swam their first hour in darkness and the sky began to lighten when Sue went into the water. The sea was calm, a little ripple but no swell of significance. But, it was cold!

We benefitted from training in cold water (whenever we could) as getting into the water wasn't a shock to the system, in fact we felt quite comfortable. However, after swimming for an hour, the cold penetrated the body and once back on the boat, getting dressed was somewhat difficult. Getting warm took nearly an hour but we had 4 hours to fill in before swimming again. This time actually went by quickly. Dressing and having a hot drink filled the first hour, then eating for energy another and grabbing a nap the third. The hour before swimming again was your turn to keep an eye on the person in the water and preparing yourself to swim again.

Water temperature at the coast was 16° but over the greater part across the channel was below 14°, less than the usual July average of 15°.

Half way and we had been swimming for about 6 – 6.5 hours. Great excitement, this was ahead of our expectations and about to equal the time taken by a relay team of 4 much younger Indian Air Force men the week before. In fact the same Indians were swimming again on this day. All was going well, everyone swimming hard, a bit more swell and the

colder water not proving to be a problem. Surprisingly the water was a darkish green with a short visibility range and an occasional lump of seaweed and two purplish jelly fish which Sue fortunately and unknowingly swam between. We were never closer than a few 100 metres from ocean going ships however Skipper Ray said one had changed course to avoid us having to stop.

After about 12 hours swimming Cap Gris Nez on the French Coast was looming ahead. We would be there in less than an hour. But wait, it's moving, going away from us to the south-west! "Tough" said the Observer. "You're not making any headway against the strong tide" said Ray the Skipper. First estimation was that we'd have to keep on swimming, being carried north-east up the coast by the tide until it turned and brought us back. This could take up to another 5 hours! But we weren't finished and the tide lessened and two hours later we were in the lee of the Cap and fittingly John, who had the idea of making this relay swim, swam the last 44 minutes to the French coast and onto a beach between Cap Gris Nez and the township of Wissant.

This wasn't without a further anxious moment for John; half way to the beach he felt something nudging his feet a couple of times but it wasn't until on the beach he discovered it was a seal. We thought it was the excitement of finishing that made him swim faster!

With the boat staying off shore some 200 metres we all swam to the beach to celebrate and in his best French John asked a couple who were beach walking to take our photograph with a camera Ray had smuggled in his bathers.

It was a happy but tired 5 who returned to Dover but not too tired to open a bottle or two of red wine but the real celebrations taking place the following evening where a few toasts were made to our coach Barb Pellick.



Ken Phillips, Sue Giles, Deborah Bloor, Ray Reynolds, John Rayburn post swim.

Evelyn and David proprietors of Varne Ridge raised the Australian flag in our honour along with the flag of India as the Indian Air Force team successfully made their second crossing on the same day.