

## The 2009 Rottneest Channel Swim – DUO Team PetRon

**2006** - Having heard of and swum with the other mugs who have done this swim Peter Burge-Lopez and I decided to do the swim as a duo.

### **2007 - Here we GO. The 2007 attempt.**

The swim has been going for almost 20 years (2010 is the 20th swim in its current form if you are interested). The swim leaves Cottesloe Beach in Perth WA and the finish is at Rottneest Island 19.2km across, dodging the big boats that criss cross frequently.



We trained, we found a boat and we arrived in Perth for the event. With just the boat and us it was an adventure into the unknown.

The swim was CANCELLED due to the weather. How dare they! For the first time ever, and we were pretty disappointed. All that effort without any thing more to show than a bike ride around Rottneest Island in the rain. A very dampening experience.



*2007 – Not a nice day for a swim- a bit choppy & swelly! #\$\$%^&\**

### **2008 - There they GO.**

Colin and Fiona did the swim in very good conditions. Ron was support crew on the team boat with Simon the skipper. A successful event for Col and Fiona with an excellent time and third place in their category. Here we learned that you need a good boat, good paddlers and a good team if you are going to make the distance. Also the current; that bit of water which can flow in any direction and who knows which direction

it is. In 2008 most teams were pulled north by the current and our team was no exception, resulting in extra effort required to swim back to the marker buoys. The current is the unknown and the trickier part of the swim for most teams if not all.

### **2009 - Here we GO again.**

Peter and I decide that we will do the swim in 2009. Back into the pool. Coach Col (Colin Marshall STG), Steve Gardner (BeaSport) and Vlad (the Lad) keep us motivated and with any luck improve our stroke (at least Ron's). They must be alright because we have to put up with each other over the next 10 months.

Training - Aiming for more than 15k per week, up and down the pool. Selected ocean swims to give us a taste of salt water. What more do you need. Probably a better diet would help.

Prep – Howard's notes gave valuable information on the preparation in the days before and for the big day as well. Great help.

The boat by Simon - a great boat.

#### **The team**

Peter Burge-Lopez	Main swimmer and the person who agreed to this whole affair
Ron Berends	Main swimmer also because I ended up with the timing chip on my ankle
Simon Hutchinson	The most important boat person and skipper extraordinaire
Bob Berends	Veteran boat person from the 2007 RCS attempt
Adrian Davey	Kayak provider and paddler extraordinaire
Barry Davey	Team strategist and paddler extraordinaire
Lorraine Berends	Team photographer, Logistics Manager, Transport manager, Communications Manager and Media relations.

The accommodation - the fabulous Quest Harbourside Apartments (great three bedroom apartment) just around the corner from the boat harbour.

#### **The Day Before**

Languishing around the hotel in Fremantle, a dip in the water, shopping for supplies and early to bed. Supplies included lots of water and some rolls and cheese and ham and eggs and bacon and snakes and fruit and drinks and water and drinks and coke and hot chocolate (didn't need any of this last one!).

#### **The Day - Saturday 21st February**

4:00 I'm up doing some egg and bacon rolls for all (improvising without a fry pan!)

5:30 Sing happy birthday to Bob (his 65th)

5:50 I check I've got my goggles, cap (I'm wearing my cossies), R& L head for Cottesloe arriving around

6:20 with the blaze abuzz with excitement. Get registration out of the way and put the timing chip on my ankle. Don't want to lose that.

#### **Back at the boat**

6:00 It's still dark as Peter, Bob, Barry & Adrian climb into to the boat and stow the gear. Is there enough? No returning for more. Joined by many others heading toward the start. The radio crackles as each boat reports in and we will in due course. Despatch Barry into the gloom on the kayak, what colour is he wearing, what colour is the ski? The beach start fades into the dawn glow of the east, only street lights are visible. The 'solos' have just left - not long now.



### **Back at the beach**

6:40 Catch up with Jan, a Dutchman, all the way from London for his second RCS, and watch the First wave of female solo swimmers accompanied with some of the males assemble in the start area. Got the call from our boat that Barry was first paddler and he was in position. We had agreed that we would pick each other up at the southern yellow buoy at the 500 metre mark.



*2009 Nice day for a swim!*

6:45 They're off and the event is GO. The sun is just rising and the sight of the swimmers, the paddlers coming into meet them and the boats waiting off shore is quite something.

7:00 Next wave of Solo swimmers are also off and swimming into the calm waters. Seems like a long time between waves as Lorraine takes numerous photos of the wanne be channel swimmer.



*Psyching UP!!!!*

7:15 The duos are off and I move into the water with blistering speed making sure I keep out of everyone's way. Perhaps too much so as I end up further from our meeting point than I had hoped. I swim over to the yellow buoy and hail Barry. Then we move (slowly) across the water. It is not long before Our boat picks us up and now we can seriously keep going. Apparently Peter and I had the same thought that this was all so easy. The water was temperature and we had passed the 1k mark and then we passed m.v. Mellissa - just so easy.



*Here we go!!!*

### **Back at the boat**

The conditions are 'as forecast', strong easterly. Whatever the chop, it's going our way. Daylight presents a vista of skis and boats in all directions. Where's Ron? Not to worry there are three lookouts: Simon the skipper; Adrian the other paddler and Bob the crew. 'Is that Barry? Is Ron there?' Ron swims past the 1K, is he going to stop?

Ron is well past the planned 30min. He's getting out, well here goes... No wonder he was reluctant to get out, what a great day for a swim. No stingers, no swell and strong breeze up the backside. There will be a record today!

8:00 Peter jumps in the water tells me "You can have a real rest now" as we high-5 and off he goes for his first stage. Our plan was 45 mins each then 40 mins each then 35 mins etc etc. Don't really know how the paddlers are going but here is a thumbs up! Must be ok then. Or is he wanting a lift?



10:30 Approx we reached our first marker. Off the coast of Perth were a number of boats at anchor waiting to get into the loading docks of Fremantle. We had picked the northernmost ship and went south of that - our strategy was not to get caught in the northerly current and be dragged way north of the course. Just go south a bit and take advantage of the current to take us north near Rottnest Island. We learned a lot from the 2008 swim and we were not going to be tricked. An anchored freighter looms up in the distance, swim under the bough, the freighter recedes into the memories of a great day and Rottnest fills the horizon.

There after the routine set in: swim, swap, drink, food, carb, gel etc. I got stung slightly in my second swim session and again just after rounding Phillip Rock (see below!!) but nothing dramatic.

12:00 Just over 5 hours gone, phone home, 2 hours to go. Inside our best estimate. We should be doing it solo.

13:00 And our 7 hour plus time looked pretty good. We were probably a little further south than preferred.

14:00 We were so close to Rottie you could almost touch it. But what's wrong? Phillip Rock is not any closer. The scene is not changing, all the other boats have 'stopped' too and it's very congested.



We were very much south of where we wanted to be. We are now swimming due north to Phillip Rock along the #\$\$%^&\*() coast against the current. We aren't the only ones, it seems like most of the fleet are with us - almost peak hour on Pitt Street. Boats of all sizes, with swimmers and kayaks swimming on and on against the current.

14:45 We rounded the Phillip Rock buoy and swam for another few minutes before Peter took over. We were down to 10 min turnarounds just so that we could keep going. The "final 2 hours" turn into 3 ½ hours. Peter thinks he can't go on but does. The good news for Peter is that I have the chip and so I have to go on!

15:00 Our strategists on the boat had to come up a plan to make sure Peter and I make it to the end. The current was tiring us out and very soon the boat had to leave the course. The plan we pursued was that I would hang onto a rope attached to the kayak and be towed in whilst Peter was swimming. When the kayak had to leave the course I would take over the swimming and we would swim in together more or less. I swapped with Peter, Adrian left the course and I started swimming to the end. I looked around for Peter (any chance for a rest was a good chance for a rest) and could not seem him at all. He must have gone with Adrian to be towed in to the beach.

15:45 I found enough energy to keep swimming and also to ensure I was not going to be passed by others in the home stretch!

15:59 Touched ground for the first time since 7:15 that morning looked around for my duo partner - but nowhere in sight. He must have gone off with Adrian!!

16:00 Hit the finish line and team PetRon was announced as finished at 8hrs and 45 mins. Lorraine was waiting (and had been for quite some time) at the finish line took a couple of photos before telling me to go back into the water. Gees I have already been in there long enough I thought. But we saw Peter coming through and so I went back, so that we could exit as a duo. 8hrs and 45 mins; let's just call it 8 hours.



16:02 Pete and I found a space on the walkway and just sat there, totally buggered and really not wanting to go anywhere. Lorraine and Adrian went off to get us a drink - nice cold beer for me, lemon lime & bitters for Peter.

16:40 Simon sent word that he was not able to find anywhere he could stick the boat so we all wandered slowly down to the boat to make the trip home. As we started our trip back we passed and wished the remaining swimmers still in the water the best of luck. With the entire team on board we got back to Freo within 30 mins. Fast boat. Left the ferry in our wake. Wished the remaining swimmers still in the water the best of luck.

It has been a fantastic opportunity to do something a little more than the ordinary. Our team was fantastic. We all had a most enjoyable day (after the event in any case) and the post event feeling was great. We returned to Ans' house to get into the pizza and beer.

So Peter and I have beaten the channel and we won't be doing it again.

Then again we have not beaten the current.