



Okay, so why? Why are we doing an English Channel Relay Swim. Well, I can't speak for the other members of my team (The fabulous Sarah, Wen, Bepi, Julia) but I totally blame the lovely Sarah Emerson for my involvement in this madness.

I knew Sarah having bumped into each other and raced together on a 6k swim in Llyn Padarn in 2022, and then last summer she popped along to TOWs and asked if I was doing any races that year (which I was not). Sarah mentioned that, apart from many other races, she had signed up for the swim in 2024 and quipped that I should join her. I immediately dismissed the idea as bonkers (I mean really....) but the idea got under my skin and found myself on Google.

Based on a couple of bits of information Sarah mentioned, I found the Mencap Marvels online. After sitting on the application form for well....a few weeks, I sent it in and that....as they say....is history.

Who are the Mencap Marvels? The Mencap Marvels are a Swim Relay Team swimming across the English Channel to raise funds for Mencap. The organiser, Nikki Pope, is a swimmer who has swum the channel, starting out in a relay, then a solo, then other insane swim challenges and to now, in 2024, organising 4 relay teams (including a boat of 11 – 13 year olds and coaching several individuals as they prepare for their own solos.

Nikki P's reason for doing this is for the joy of swimming, seeing folk like our team succeed and, of course, raising money for Mencap (Mencap support her autistic nephew, and his family).

Training? Oh yes, I love to swim, but the last 6 months I have swam 3 or 4 times a week. Sarah and I have trained together – Hathersage, Matlock, Combs, Buxton, New Mills.....and often for Sarah...lidos/pools in the south of England due to work. Any pool/session that fits around work and family filled the requirement (and the swim diary).



I have trained with both Glossop Tri Club (GTC) and High Peak Tri Club (HPTC) – each offering excellent coaching and company. And obviously having TOWs since May has been brilliant. It's not salty, and it's not really wavy, but it is great for the long cold swims.



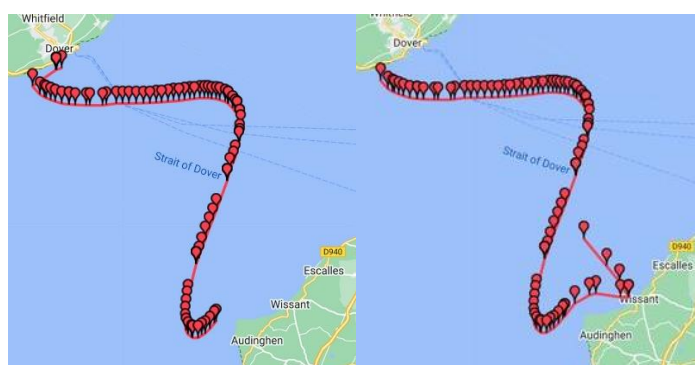
The Rules. The Channel Swim Association (CSA) is in charge – and there are many rules. To get the green light to do the swim, we need to:

- Complete a Qualification Swim (2 hours, at 15.5°C or under)
- Pass a Medical
- Proven too be able to swim in the dark (night swim required)
- Be ready to deal with Jellyfish, Diesel fumes, Seasickness.....



The Swim. We have a window to swim – 29th June – 6th Jul. Within the window, there are 4 slots, and our team have slot 2. Slot 1 always goes to a solo swimmer so that, if the conditions are not optimum, they get to postpone and Slot 2 gets to go. We have to be in Dover able to get to the dock, kit in tow, when we get the nod from our pilot. The boat collects us in the Harbour and takes us to Samphire Hoe, for the start. Swimmer 1 (the fastest) gets on the beach, and well, then we go.. the stopwatch begins.

When we get on the boat, we have a swim order and must stick to it. One hour at a time, no deviation, no swapping, no stopping. If one person decides they have had enough, the team fails. It really is a team event! Its never a straight swim....it might look a bit like below....



The Boat. We are swimming with the Sea Leopard. The Pilot, Stuart, will be in charge and guide us across the channel. The Pilot is really experienced and has already guided teams across the water this year. It is amazing how you can see it happening with the trackers (and I promise to share the tracking when we get the green light!)



The Kit. Standard swim suit, and for the boys, speedos only. 1 hat, goggles and nothing else (well lights at night), Definitely no wetsuits.....

The Team. The most important bit. Me (Nikki Cooper), Sarah, Wen, Bepi and now, our recent and very welcome addition, Julia.



Sarah is local and a regular at TOWs. Sarah is a fantastic swimmer (and a wonderful training buddy). I have chased Sarah up and down many pools in the last few months! Sarah has amused Eric recently, complaining that Combs was too warm in May (although now that we have completed our cold qualifiers...we are all hoping for a little more warmth). Not the usual comment from our TOWs regulars.

Wen is our Taiwanese team mate. Superhuman and on a mission to develop and promote open water swimming in Taiwan. Wen is training for a Solo Cross Channel Swim in 2025 (so squeezing in 2 relays this year!).

Bepi is our Italian team mate. Amazing athlete and competes at a very high level in triathlons across Italy. Bepi is not (technically) allowed to swim in the sea at the moment in his home town (Bari) as the G7 Summit is being held there - so will be sneaking into the water in the next week or so.... Training does not stop just because world leaders are in town! Bepi was looking for a challenge – so why not swim the English Channel?

And last, but very much not least, is **Julia**. Julia is also a regular at TOWs and has stepped in to join us with less than three weeks to go. Already swim fit and ready to go. We were, until a week or so ago a team of six, but two team members withdrew. Julia is also swimming a Solo Cross Channel Swim in 2025. So like Wen..... superhuman (and slightly bonkers).

The Important bit. We are doing this for a challenge but also to raise money for a fabulous cause. Mencap does fantastic work supporting individuals with learning disability. If you can, we would all be very grateful if you could support us:

https://www.justgiving.com/page/nikk-cooper-1700925120963?utm_term=ENRkMZNRM



Thanks Nikki, Sarah, Wen, Bepi and Julia.