



THE CURRENTS ARE
DECEPTIVELY STRONG IN THE
STRAIT AND CONDITIONS
WEREN'T GOOD

IMPOSSIBLE, IMPROBABLE, INEVITABLE

Andrew Stevens from Perth, Australia, and two of his mates took on the 15km Bonifacio Strait from Corsica to Sardinia

It is unfortunate that the Bocche di Bonifacio swim is not better known internationally as it could have accommodated at least 30 swimmers on the day, rather than just the nine of us who took part, and it is a lovely middle-distance open water swim, in a world class location.

I was there with my two swimming mates, Mauritian Jose de Charmoy and South African Mike Oberholzer. Although we are all well into our 60s and I only learned to swim front crawl at the age of 52 we've had some fantastic swimming adventures over the years.



The inspiration for swimming from Corsica to Sardinia came from reading about South African long-distance swimmer Carina Bruwer's crossing a few years previously. It became something of a dream of ours and we started to make enquiries.

NUOTO IN ACQUE LIBERE

Mike came across the site "Circuito Gran Fondo Italia" that promotes a series of beautiful open water swims in Italy run by Alessandro Pilati, who heads an organisation called NAL (Nuoto in Acque Libere – i.e. open



Andrew, Jose and Mike

water swimming). Alessandro organises an annual 15km swim (with a five-day window period) from the little beach below the cliffs at Capo Faro Pertusato Lighthouse at the southernmost tip of Corsica to Rena Bianca beach at the town of Santa Teresa Gallura in Sardinia. We registered with Alessandro for the period 19-23 September 2018. The five-day window is to allow for variable weather and, hopefully, choosing a day with optimal swimming conditions.

Before flying to Europe, I went to South Africa in early September for →

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Remember to wear briefs for the briefing

WE WERE TREATED LIKE CELEBRITIES WITH INTERVIEWS AND AN AWARD CEREMONY

← a final 10 days of training with Mike and Jose. Then, on 16 September we left Johannesburg for Rome on another adventure. From Rome we flew to Olbia airport in Sardinia and then travelled by car to Santa Teresa Gallura.

BEAUTIFUL SWIMS AND WALKS

On arriving at Santa Teresa Gallura we were thrilled that we had chosen this swim. Alessandro had arranged accommodation at Capo Testa, which is a short drive from Santa Teresa Gallura. He had also arranged for the boats and skippers. Alessandro went out of his way to make our stay interesting. In the period leading up to the actual crossing he arranged beautiful swims as well as walks around the Capo Testa peninsula and we managed to see Moon Valley and Faro Capo Testa. It was easy to travel from point to point as all our belongings (clothes, cellphones, keys, wallets, slip slops etc) were stored inside our new waterproof safety buoys which Alessandro makes compulsory. We also did a full-moon midnight swim in one of the lagoons.

However, the days were slipping by, and we still hadn't had the right

conditions for the swim we had travelled all this way for. On the fourth day, with conditions deteriorating further, we had no option but to go for it regardless, if we wanted a chance of getting across, so at 7 in the morning we set out for Sardinia.

The currents are deceptively strong in the Strait and conditions weren't good. It was windy with big swells and both Mike and I swallowed a considerable amount of water. I think that this, together with having changed my normal diet, contributed to my feeling sick. After the first drinks stop I started to have gut issues that resulted in me being quite debilitated and I ended up stopping five times during the swim. Mike also wasn't feeling well. Jose however was as strong as an ox and pulled us both through.

SWIMMING IN FORMATION

We had arranged that the boat would be down current from us (i.e. on our left) with Jose on the right being our wingman, determining the distance from the boat as well as our overall direction. I then used him as my marker while Mike, swimming on the left, used me as his marker. This worked

incredibly well considering that we were used to normally swimming with kayakers and were also not used to swimming in this formation with strong side-currents.

We ended up completing the swim in 5hrs 17 minutes which we, some of us being slowish swimmers, were very chuffed with. We were fortunate to have a lovely lady, Elisabetta, who was accompanying one of the other swimmers on the trip, to second us on our boat. She had a good command of English and was kept very busy handing out cramp tablets, drinks, feed and whatever was needed to the three of us. This was a great help and something to bear in mind for swims in a foreign country.

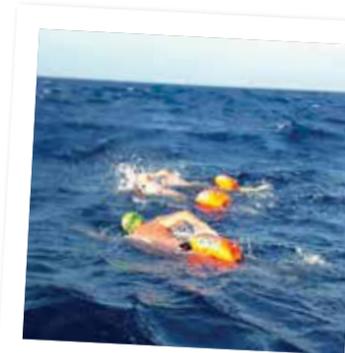
Out of the nine initial swimmers, seven of us finished with Alessandro winning the event. One of the female swimmers gave up about half way because of the swells and one of the

Italian chaps, whose skipper (his father!) had taken the wrong line, couldn't make it to the finish as the current was too strong to swim back along the Sardinian coast.

For us, however, it was a dream come true, and all the unpleasant winter training had paid off! We had an amazing reception on our arrival at the finish and were treated like celebrities with interviews and an award ceremony. The townspeople were never short of showing us hospitality. The Mayor and Local Council did everything to make our stay an enjoyable one and the crossing a success. It is an experience which we will never forget and doing the swim in such amazing surroundings made it all that much more special: beautiful scenery, Roman granite column quarries, clear water, rich local history, archaeology and architecture, blue flag beaches, water temp of 25 degrees and, of course, the fantastic Mediterranean cuisine, beer and wine! There is much to experience and a ferry trip to the town of Bonifacio in Corsica is a must.

I really recommend the Bonifacio swim and would rate it as one of the best I have ever participated in. It's not an easy swim, especially with all the cross-currents, but I must say it is excellently and quite professionally organised. Socially we had lots of fun meeting and mixing with the other swimmers and Jose ended up giving them all 'Zulu' animal nicknames. The safety aspect of the swim was paramount and we were all issued with safety buoys and lights. We each had to take an ECG stress test before being accepted for the swim as well as submitting a swimming CV. Alessandro also arranges for a doctor to accompany the swimmers on the day.

Our motto is: "Impossible, Improbable, Inevitable". This is how our swims usually turn out, and it was no different with this one 🐻



Success! All that unpleasant winter training had paid off

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