



# Wahoo Witness

February 2014

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This special edition is about Dreams and Aspirations and features the inspirational stories of six Wahoo members - enjoy their tales.....

## Graeme's English Channel Story

GP "Speedking", hater of open water swimming is going to attempt an English Channel crossing!!!....

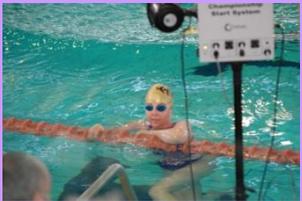
I was on holiday in Cape Town in December 2012, and bumped into Roger on the 24th of Dec at the Hout Bay harbor. He had the day before taken me on my very first cold Cape Town sea swim. From never thinking that I would be able to handle the cold, let alone enjoy a sea swim, I loved just about every minute of it. The getting in and feeling the cold was the part that I didn't enjoy. Anyway, on with the story of bumping in to Roger - he told me that he had been watching the conditions and that the 26th was a perfect day to do a Robben Island crossing and asked/told me that if I wanted to come along. For those of you that know Dodge, he can be quite persuasive. So there I was on the morning of the 26th, sitting at 3 Anchor Bay waiting for Roger and Co to arrive. The conditions were perfect and the swim was one of the most memorable things I had ever done in my life!

As a kid, I had heard about these crazy people that had swum across the English Channel. I never thought it would ever be something that I could achieve or even begin to think of doing. Where would you even start?

I was back in JHB and training at JCE. I had Roger in the lane next to me, and it dawned on me that I had one of the most accomplished endurance swimmers in the world next to me! After we had finished our session, I nervously mentioned to Roger that I would love to do something extreme and that a lifelong dream of mine was to swim the Channel. Knowing that Roger would laugh at me if he thought that I didn't have what it takes, I asked him if he would be prepared to help me. After spending 2 hours explaining to me that what I was thinking of doing was not easy and that more people fail than succeed, "excitedly" said yes, and before I could blink he had made contact with a number of pilots and we had secured a slot for August 2015. GULP!!!!

So that's how it came about that I got myself a slot to attempt a crossing. The journey has just begun and there are going to be many many miles of training that need to be covered and many many hours of panic still ahead!





## Yvonne's VMC Challenge

Once upon a time, in a land far far away, there was a magical purple kingdom called Wahoo. The kingdom of Wahoo was a special place, and ruled by a gracious Queen called Helen, who cared for her people very much. The people of Wahoo were very special indeed, insofar that they lived on land and in the water, oh and they were purple too. This is pretty rare...

The people of Wahoo, also known as Wahooligans, lived happy and prosperous lives. They were a social bunch, and lived to party and eat and drink, and in general all merriment. However, life in Wahoo was not without its challenges, and the Wahooligans had to face daily struggles, such as how to dive whilst keeping your goggles on; remembering to count strokes, and the worst struggle of all: under-over-sprints.

Apart from these struggles, the Wahooligans lived in peace, and were loved by all the neighbouring kingdoms of Phoenix and Coelacanths. All the kingdoms would have feasts together after galas, and would laugh and dance, and lets just say the Wahooligans were considerably more graceful in the water than on a dance floor. Nobody's perfect..

Life continues in this fashion, until one fateful day, when a terrifying dragon moved into the kingdom. This dragon caused fear and mayhem, and all the Wahooligans trembled at the mere mention of his name. He was referred to, with great reverence, as the Vehemently Monstrous Crocodile, in short the VMC. The VMC was 200 metres long, covered in scales, with ferocious teeth. The VMC was a terrible dragon, he made both grown ups and children cry, he made the flowers wilt, and worst of all, the VMC caused the wine fountains to dry up. This was a big problem for the Wahooligans. The Crocodile-dragon had to go.

In order to quell a revolution, as a wineless Kingdom is a horrible place, Queen Helen Lawless (ironic right) put forth a royal decree: Whoever defeats the dragon, shall be crowned with glory, and a golden throne. The Wahooligans roared with joy, as gold is such a complimentary colour to purple. However, one problem: who will be brave enough to take on the VMC? The Wahooligans all murmured between themselves, but none was prepared to take on this goliath mission. Until a fair maiden stepped forward, and declared: "I will take on the VMC, and not only will I defeat it, but I will slay it!!" The Wahooligans had mixed reactions, they weren't too happy leaving the fate of future wine fountains to a young maiden, who had only recently joined the Kingdom, but there was no other option. Also, if the young maiden was silly enough to nominate herself, that's her own problem. Thus they happily accepted the maiden's nomination.

The Wahooligans were not without concern though, and they appointed three knights to assist the maiden in her quest. You see, one cannot just take on the VMC on a whim. Intense training of a physical, mental, emotional, spiritual nature has to be completed. It was decided that the knights Alexander, Jacobus and Theodore would guide the maiden on her quest, as they had experience in the dragon slaying business, but were now retired.

The maiden, however, had a best friend by the name of Matthew. The two were inseparable. But Matthew had a secret, which only the maiden knew of - Matthew was a powerful wizard. As Matthew was a very humble young man (with the best hair no girl has ever been blessed with - probably magic), he did not want anyone to know of his great powers. But as his friend was in trouble, the VMC was a 200m long dragon, remember, he knew he had to help.



So the maiden and the wizard set off, together with the trio of knights, in order to obtain sufficient training to enable the maiden to take on the beast...

Eight months later...

The maiden is exhausted, but ecstatic!!! She had already slayed two monsters, one as tall as 50 metres, and another stronger dragon, as wide as 100metres. But the maiden was taking strain. Despite the two victories, her wizard friend had a tough time keeping her motivated, as she was really frightened of the VMC, the duel date being only 3 months away.

The wizard reminded her of how far she had come, that when she started she couldn't even slay a puny 25m dragon, and now she had just defeated one 4 times its size. The wizard made her look in a lake, and showed her the muscles she had developed, the biceps that were bulging (they're still working on the triceps and lats...). The wizard reminded her of the golden crown, and the maiden, being a girl after all, received renewed strength. She would have that golden crown no matter what. It was really pretty and shiny!!!!



The wizard and the maiden set off again, and they passed the lands of the knight Alexander. This knight had only recently slayed a dragon, and he invited the wizard and the maiden to his training grounds, named the Gymnasium of Virgin Active. This was a terrible place, but the knight, together with the wizard, agreed that the maiden needed intense strength training, if she was to have the endurance to defeat the dragon. For as big as the dragon was, it was quite fast, and she would need to keep up. The maiden sucked it up, had a protein shake, and faced the gauntlet of bar bells and dumb bells and dead lifts, amidst fears that she really doesn't want to look like a man.



And this is where we leave the brave maiden and her wizard, as doing deadlifts and lat pulls and the like is really boring, and nobody cares. We wish the maiden luck in her endeavours, and look forward to her finally facing the VMC, and bringing peace and prosperity and WINE back to the magical land of Wahoo.



## Caren's Robben Island Journey



After relocating to Durban and becoming a stay-at-home-mom, I started swimming and with my friend Heather Campbell's encouragement I joined Masters Swimming and started competing in the Midmar Mile. I have participated in 8 SA Masters Nationals Championships and had completed 10 Midmar Miles. So I said to myself "ok - what is next?" So I applied for and completed the 8-mile Pink Drive last year. Again I said to myself "ok - what is next?" I had seen Roger Finch's (fellow member of Wahoo Masters Swimming Club) Open Water adventures unfold on Facebook for about a year, which included 16 Robben Island Crossings, so I thought "that's my next one...." I approached Roger and asked him if he would help me. He said "sure I will help you - there is someone else who has also approached me - her name is Sam so we can train and prepare together as a group". And so it began....

Sam and I trained with Roger throughout winter at the outdoor JCE pool. If I told you it was fun or enjoyable I would be lying and Sam would agree - it was sheer torture! There were times that Sam and I would text each other in the morning and say "have you seen the sun yet?" On the days that we could see no sun Sam would say "I'm F\*&%ing terrified" It really was terrifying getting into that frozen pool in the middle of winter! Most days the water temp was below 16 degrees and the outside temperature was below 12 degrees! IF we were lucky, the sun shone - those were the good days.... But we stuck to our program and persevered. Most days we swam in excess of 4km in sub 16 degree water for at least 1h30. If only you could have been a fly on the wall in the showers afterwards....

We trained and trained and trained and waited for the South Easter to stop blowing gales in Cape Town so that we could do what we had trained so hard to do. That day finally arrived on 22 Jan 2014.

Our Robben Island Crossing was truly an AMAZING experience.

We set off in 3 boats with a support crew of Keith and Arend the pilots, Lizzy - Roger's long-time friend and open water crew-member, Lindsey - Roger's amazing and supportive wife, Ron - my Dad who drove 14 hours from East London to Cape Town to support me, Ryan - Graham's partner and Sam's physio and Chris - tv guy and a new friend.

On the way over to the island we encountered a bait ball (school of fish) with plenty of dolphins, seals and penguins. We arrived and the water temp was 13.5 degrees - quite cold but swimmable. Sam and Roger started at 9h25 and then at 10h00 Graham, Theo (seasoned CT swimmer with 76 crossings under the belt) and I were off. All was going great for the first hour or so until Graham started running into trouble during the second hour. This meant we had to slow down and wait for him - even tread water at times and this made us COLD - I could not stop swimming because it was too cold. By then the temp was down to 12 but of course the boat crew did not tell us this at the time! Graham eventually succumbed to hypothermia and returned to the boat. At this point Theo and I could speed up and get warm.

I had a seal appear out of the blue and spent quite a long part of the swim with me! Theo and I caught up to Sam and Roger at the reef as planned so that we could finish together. I tried to encourage Sam but it was immediately apparent that she was in trouble with a few hundred meters to go! We could see the people on the beach and we could hear the waves - but alas - she was totally oblivious to this and once again I was getting COLD - it was 10 degrees now. So Theo said "lets go in and we can come back to fetch her" so that's what we did. With Roger's encouragement and the help of the swells and waves, she made it and was whisked off to the Lifesaving clubhouse for emergency treatment for hypothermia. It took 2 hours but she recovered and was back to the old Sam. Most importantly - she crossed!!!!



Sam Logan was waiting on the beach with hot chocolate – that was the best hot chocolate I have ever tasted! Eurika was also there – what a special moment for me to have a friend waiting for me on the beach. Roger had a meltdown with me and cried with relief and pride....really touching and made me realise just what a personal sacrifice he had made to give up on a few of his dreams to help Sam and I achieve our Dream – such a special guy. Theodore Yach did his 77th crossing, supporting me on his birthday and asked me afterwards when I was doing the next one.....Well Theo, it may be sooner than you think because THE BUG HAS BITTEN ☺

## Roger's Adventures

2013 was quite a special year for me swimming Arizona 37 km and Lake Zurich in May 30 km, getting really sick on the flight home, no not too much beer, then joining up with Caren Strydom to start training for her first Robben Island attempt.

Now Caren has swum a fantastic crossing from Robben Island in the coldest ever Temperature recorded for a first attempt the last 2 Km just above the 9 degree mark. My job is done and for 2014 I look to a few big Cape swims, looking for weather to attempt a crossing of the notorious False Bay before all the Great Whites migrate back into False Bay for Winter I'm sure that there were plenty lazy Great Whites that decided to stay as there were lots of tourists in Cape Town over December. I then have a booking to swim the Tsugaru Channel in Japan which is between Hokkaido and Honshu the two mainlands of Japan. A very difficult swim with all of the top swimmers only achieving it on a second or third attempt. My slot is for July this year.

Looking back I had Three Big Swim Dreams - Arizona, Zurich and New York. Then it turned into Four Dreams the last to ensure that I prepared Caren to not just succeed in her Robben Island Dream but to make sure that she did it really well. All of my Dreams came true especially the last one !

To keep going after a Dream Swim especially one like The English Channel is very very difficult as you have achieved the most renowned swim in the entire world. Then you arrive back home and face your very same training lane and start swimming thinking why am I doing this? I nearly killed myself in the last year with all the training. Then I start thinking about all the swims around the world and very soon a new dream starts to form in my mind. I choose the a swim that is in a country that I would like to visit BUT it has to be one of the most respected swims if I am going to spend so much time and money working on that dream.

After that excitement sets in and the rest is history!

My choice of photo for this article is a tribute to a Lady who has just shown the world who she really is. Here's looking at you Robben Island.



## Jason's Robben Island Crossing

I joined Wahoo with the intention of improving my open water swimming and one day able to swim Robben Island.



In September ORT SA arranged a charity swim for November, so I signed up and started training with the other 22 swimmers. We looked for as much cold water as possible, swimming outdoors and at Bass Lake but the water temp started to increase as the days got warmer, so I flew to Cape Town in October for 3 days to acclimatize to cold water.

On the 24th November was my crossing and the day could not be better. Water was 14-16 degrees and it was flat. We met at the Waterfront and caught boats to the island, this is where we met our boatmen as each relay team or solo swimmer had his own boat. We went off in two batches and I was the first batch. Of the 22 swimmers, only 6 of us swam to English channel Rules, the rest in wetsuits and in relay teams .

I swam 150 metres to the island because the boats are not allowed to land on shore. As soon as I stepped on to the island my crossing had begun. I started to swim through the kelp and passed my boatman who now tagged onto me and was by my side the whole way on my right. I was fed every half hour and the boat directed my line to shore. You can not touch the boat during the swim.



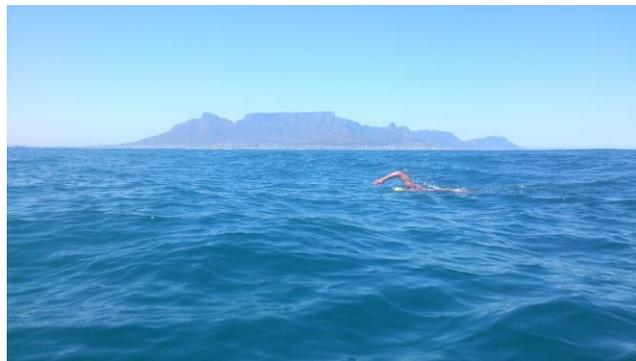
At around 3.5 hours I hit the sand at Big Bay, I was hypothermic and needed medical assistance from the lifesavers and the medics who were on standby. It took me an hour for my body temp to rise, it got to as low as 29.5.

I have done Comrades, Ironman and Dusi, but this crossing was special. I met amazing people along the way and loved the training.

In September I will go to the ceremony where i will receive my medal and certificate which they have once a year.

I thank the lifesavers, boatmen and ORT SA for making my dream come true.

WOW, what a day!!





## Conquering the 8 mile.. A short story but a tall swimmer

As many of you will have noticed the last 2 seasons I have been keeping a very low profile and have turned up at only a few select events to make a cameo appearance. It's just been "one of those years" or two in my case where life and work have had to come first with swimming having to take a somewhat sulky backseat. Some of you may even recall that I was even out of the water for 6 months completely last year as trying to stay fit and working ridiculous hours is not a winning combination and battle that work eventually won.



Since it hasn't been a 'great' couple of seasons I wanted to make this season memorable by at least having achieved something that I never attempted before and completing the 8 mile has always been a bit of a "bucket list" thing for me. The first opportunity to do the 8 mile 'presented itself' or rather with the 'assistance of an invite' from fellow master swimmer, Anesta de Jager, I was put forward for the 8 mile around 6 or 7 years ago when I was very much involved in open water swimming.



Unfortunately "The 8 Mile Club" was particularly disorganised that year and they only got back to me in early December. At the time I hadn't been back from the UK very long (or even part of Wahoo at that time) and I felt that I had to decline as it was a little too late in the year to raise the amount of sponsorship required as I knew a very limited number of people having lived overseas and out of Johannesburg for almost 15 years and did not want to find myself personally having to foot the bill on the shortfall against what I had pledged to raise.

Last year was a different story..



New year.. new job.. a change of career and company with a CEO who 'off the bat' showed appreciation and understanding of the dedication and training it takes to be a competitive athlete. It was at his suggestion that I tackle the 8 mile and offered me full company sponsorship to do so.

Our beloved Caren Strydom, who nagged me incessantly (ok..3 times) to send her my CV, which ultimately opened the door for me to land me this job and for which I will always be grateful, smoothed the way for me to get onto the 8 mile waiting list and on the very last day before cut off I managed to secure the final position on the Pink Drive 8 Mile Team when a previous 8 miler decided to drop out.



2013 flew by and my training was almost relegated completely to weekends but as Christmas holidays loomed I knew it was time to pull out all the stops and get cracking. After all, what do you say to the big boss... "Sorry to waste the company's money. I just didn't train hard enough." Not quite the conversation I was looking to have so the December holidays saw me up at 4am and putting in 5km every morning and I even made a concerted effort to cross train to save myself from potential injury.

So the question is do I think that I am ready..



Well, I'm sure it's the same for all of us.. If you had asked me that question 4 weeks ago I would have had a very different answer but work has come rushing back in to primary focus and the freedom to train just seems to evaporate into thin air whilst I juggle time and commitments. A slight but well caught chest infection and nagging cough hasn't been very helpful either but that aside the question still "am I ready for this...??!"

I would definitely say not as much as I'd like to be but then again I am someone who likes to 'over prepare' (that's just the way I roll.. lol). That being said I also know that whilst many sat there with their feet up enjoying the holidays, I certainly put the hard work in and as for the rest.. Well, I think that the key here will be just to pace myself.. This is not a 'race' per say but rather a test of one's endurance and mental ability to push through when things get tough.



What I do know is that it will be previous experience, heart and pure brute determination will carry me though.

I know perfectly well that I'm going to hurt a bit on Monday but that is the joy of 'ticking one off the bucket list'. It's not supposed to be easy.. otherwise everyone would be doing it!



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