

Like climbing Mount Everest, swimming the English Channel has attracted people who wish to test the limits of their endurance. Read this passage about how to plan for this 21-mile swim between England and France. Then answer the questions that follow.

SWIM THE ENGLISH CHANNEL

by Hunter S. Fulghum

What You Will Need

- Swim goggles (bring spares)
- Swim cap
- Swimming garment—the Channel Swimming Association (CSA) rules allow for a garment, noting that it may not be neoprene or any material that might assist the swimmer in floating.
- Feeding stick with basket for passing food and liquids
- Food and liquids—carried on the pilot boat
- Grease—any type of protective grease is allowed under CSA rules. A mixture of lanolin and petroleum jelly provided by Boots Chemists, Ltd., in Dover, is highly recommended and perhaps just a bit traditional.
- Glow sticks
- One pilot boat, suitable for a Channel crossing, with observer from the CSA and boat crew (captain and deck hand minimum)—arrangements for the pilot boat will be made through the CSA.
- Support team—include your coach, trainer, and a medical technician at minimum.
- Dry clothing
- Towel
- Passport

Time Required

- 1 Aside from training and preparation time, which depend on the individual, allow approximately 16 hours to make the crossing. Please note that the weather on the English Channel can change dramatically, and you should time your swim around periods of good weather, typically in late spring or summer.

Background

- 2 It's not entirely certain when the English Channel was first crossed by a swimmer, but it has certainly been going on for well over 125 years. Dozens of people have made the swim, some of them completing it multiple times. At last check, the reigning champion had completed the crossing 32 times.
- 3 You can swim the Channel at your own risk if you like, but to be officially recognized for doing it, you must apply to the CSA, which is the official body responsible for documenting all swims. . . . You'll need to be able to prove that you are healthy, capable of the swim, and between the ages of 16 and 55. The details of proof required are provided by the CSA, but in general you'll need a doctor to sign an affidavit certifying your health and condition.
- 4 The majority of England-to-France swims start immediately before or after high water at Shakespeare Beach, particularly during the spring tides. The weather is better this time of year, and the periods of slack water* are longer. You will get minimal help from the tide, since it runs parallel to the coast and you'll be swimming across it, but with proper planning, a good pilot, and some luck, you won't be hindered by it.
- 5 Aside from the dangers of hypothermia, cramps, and drowning, the biggest risk in the Channel is ship traffic. On a typical day, there are over 600 vessels moving through the shipping lanes, plus assorted ferries, hovercraft, and small boats crossing. You will cross a five-nautical mile (nm)–wide channel on the English side for English inshore traffic, followed by a four-nm–wide lane for traffic heading out into the Atlantic. Then there is a one-nm–wide zone that separates the major shipping lanes. After that will be two lanes on the French side, one five-nm–wide for ships headed for the North Sea, and the other a three-nm–wide channel for French inshore traffic. In other words, for 17 of the 18.2 nautical miles of the swim, you'll be swimming against the light.
- 6 You need to be aware of this, but do not worry. Your pilot boat carries the responsibility to monitor shipping traffic with radar and bulletins transmitted by the French and English coast guards. The pilot boat may reroute you or have you tread water in the event of oncoming shipping. In a crisis situation, the pilot boat will remove you from the water.

Instructions

I. PLAN THE SWIM AND TRAIN

- 7 Before you begin your attack on the Channel, you must train for the effort. Not only are you taking on a significant distance (from Shakespeare Beach, Dover, to Cap Gris Nez near Calais is 18.2 nm, or approximately 21 standard miles), you

* *slack water* — the period at high or low tide when there is no visible flow of water

will be doing so in very cold water for an extended period of time. At its warmest, Channel water temperatures may hit 65 degrees Fahrenheit (toward the end of August).

8 To deal with the distance and the temperatures, set up a training regimen of both distance swimming and cold-water swimming. Your preparation should focus on endurance and the cold. Do not train in warm waters. This will not teach your body to withstand the cold, and your performance will be severely degraded by the Channel's temperatures, impairing your speed and increasing your risk of hypothermia and death.

9 Gain a modest amount of weight in the form of fat to provide a quick reserve of energy. Eight to ten pounds is a good target. With good training—swimming on an empty stomach—you will teach your body to prey on the fat reserves quickly and efficiently. The added fat will help with buoyancy and heat retention, too.

2. LUBE UP

10 Before you enter the water, put on your swim garment and apply a coat of grease to your body. The benefit of this includes a small measure of insulation against the cold and a barrier between your skin and the salt water, preventing excess fluid loss from your body and over-absorption of saltwater. It will also prevent stings from jellyfish.

11 Some portion of your crossing will probably take place in the dark or twilight hours. When this happens, or if the visibility is poor due to fog or rain, attach a glow stick to your suit. These are waterproof and provide good light for several hours. This will make it easier for the pilot boat to keep track of you.

3. SWIM

12 Proceed to Shakespeare Beach. Get in the water. A CSA representative will note your time of entry. Point yourself in the proper direction (east, and slightly south). Swim.

13 Individual swimming style is not dictated. Use the stroke or combination of strokes that are most efficient for you. Keep a steady pace and keep moving—this will help you keep warm. Each stroke brings you that much closer to France.

14 Throughout the swim, pay attention to how you are feeling and your body temperature. If you begin to get too cold, you'll exhibit it in a number of ways, including blue lips or extremities, a lack of feeling in your fingers and toes, and dizziness or disorientation. If this occurs, throw in the towel and climb into the boat. You can try again another time.

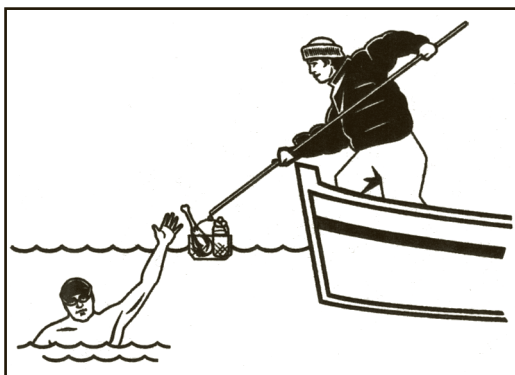
4. CARBO-LOAD AND HYDRATE

15 Given your lack of insulation, it is essential to keep warm. The Channel waters can and will cause hypothermia in the inexperienced swimmer in 30 to 60 minutes. To prevent this, you must keep swimming. Movement keeps your blood flowing and burns calories, helping to maintain core body temperature.

- 16 Take regular breaks to eat and drink, once every 30 to 60 minutes. Foods should be high in energy and easily digested. Try plain tofu, which is high in protein, and foods high in carbohydrates, but particularly eat those containing natural sugars, such as apples, bananas, or dried fruits. Be careful, overindulgence will cause gastrointestinal distress. Cornbread or corn muffins are also good. Drink plenty of water and hot liquids (try warmed, diluted Gatorade, for example) to avoid dehydration. Warming the liquids will assist in keeping your body's core temperature up where it needs to be.

IMPORTANT NOTE

- 17 By the CSA rules, you may not use any sort of aid in flotation during the swim. This means that while you are allowed to accept food and drink from the pilot boat, you may not touch the boat or any person on it. The standard method of getting your food or liquids is to have it handed over with the feeding stick.



At no time are you allowed to touch the boat or anyone in it. Have the boat crew hand you food and liquids, using a feeding stick.

5. BONJOUR, MON AMI

- 18 Under your own power, stagger, crawl, or walk up the beach. Once you touch dry ground above the high-water mark, you've completed the swim and will go into the books. Your only concern at this stage, beyond warming up and towelng off, is to present your passport to the waiting French immigration officials.