

Anacapa/Santa Barbara

Ranie Pearce

2019 was a funny year for me. I set a crazy huge goal to swim the North Channel in early July. The North Channel is cold 53-54F. It's full of lion's mane jellyfish and the same distance as the English Channel (21 miles). Many nights I was sure that I was ridiculous to think that I could swim it. But I also thought that if I trained hard enough, I could. To that end I planned an Anacapa swim in early April and a trip to Ireland for the *Hit The Wall* swim camp in May. It got so that a five-hour swim in 50F degree water was no big deal. But I was worried about Anacapa in April. Who wouldn't be? It would be cold and possibly rough. But instead, it was cold and foggy, and I wasn't allowed to swim.

There went a large sum of cash down the drain...and there went a test to see how ready I was. On to *Hit The Wall* and the 10 hour swim in 53-54F water. I'm not going to lie, the ten-hour swim tested me and made me cry, but I did it. Looking back, I wish that I had done three or four more of them, but I didn't know what I didn't know. When it came time for my attempt, I was so happy just to get in and try. The water was beautiful, my crew was cheery, and I was swimming in the North Channel. The conditions were good. Not glass, but I would never expect that. The lion's mane were plentiful, but I had hopes that I could avoid most of them. I got a few stings and started to feel cold. So my crew began offering me warm feeds more often. This turned out not to be the best idea, because I was taking in too much liquid, and my stomach began to roil. Then I got stung some more, and the cold really settled in. They tried everything, but I was not swimming well, my back was locked up, and my stomach was bloated, and my mind was thinking about the pain in my throat from the acid reflux.

My speed dropped even lower, and at five and a half hours, I asked how it was looking, and Charles said that at this rate it would be four more tides...a 24 hr swim at 52F...I had some thinking to do, and I was barely swimming. At this point I wasn't even trying to avoid the jellyfish which I understood, even in my cold brain, to be a bad sign. My back ached and felt locked up, which I understood to be a sign that your kidneys could be in trouble, so I said, I haven't peed in hours, and I'm not going to be able to keep swimming in this cold for 18 more hours, I'm done.

I beat myself up over that decision. I had never "quit" before. I had not swum to the point of not being able to continue...I had not 'given it my all', I had made an educated mental choice to end my swim because it looked bad and I was cold and in pain. So I wondered if maybe I couldn't have turned it around if I had stuck with it a bit longer? I wondered if I had only done "X" differently could I have continued...I beat myself up for 'tapping out'. But if I remember correctly, I was not really swimming by that point. A ridiculously slow and ineffective stroke rate, no kick, no rotation...I wasn't swimming, I was struggling. I know I couldn't have made it, but I don't know if something might have changed. I'll never know. I need to be ok with the fact that on that given day, under those specific conditions, I couldn't continue my swim. I made the right call. It was very cold (52f), I was stung repeatedly by many jellyfish, my body was not performing, and I was suffering from painful acid reflux...combined, these things caused me to tap out.

So I set my sights on closing the loop on this swim year and finishing what I started with a second Anacapa attempt. Wednesday October 16th I got on a boat and we motored out to Anacapa Island in the wee hours of the morning. The conditions were lovely, not a whisper of fog. I jumped into the warm (72F) water. I swam to the Island, touched the rock face and raised my hand to signal that I was ready to swim. There were birds circling all around the island, and the sky was just beginning to lighten. The view of Anacapa and it's famed arch was stunning. The water was basically flat with a slight swell. I couldn't ask for better conditions. A nice change of pace from the last attempt when we couldn't even see the island from 50 feet.

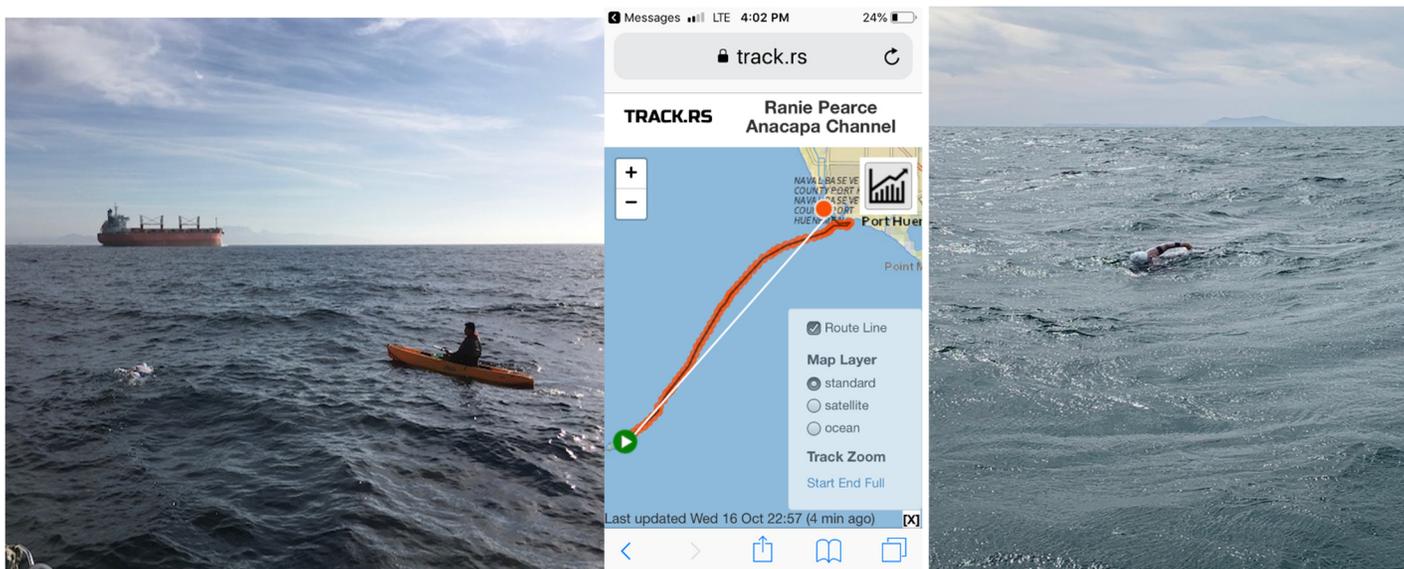
The plan was to swim with an outgoing push north towards Gina (an Oil Platform) and in six hours when the tide changed, I would get a few hours of a push south as I swam east and I'd hit Huememe Beach. The swim was fabulous. My mind did wander a bit in the third or fourth hour, I lost focus, and day dreamed about other things. At some point I had to swim straight north for ten or so minutes to wait on a southbound tanker, but that was okay because I wanted to see Gina.

At exactly six hours into the swim the tide turned, and the winds picked up. Things went from cake to shit show! Dawn pulled the Kayaker and said that they would pull me if I couldn't swim right with the boat. I was not worried, this was the

kind of water I liked, but I did want to swim east just off the waves which was not her plan. I swam hard for more than an hour and was worried that I might not make the finish...I knew that if I missed the landing, the swim would be much longer, and maybe I wouldn't be allowed to finish...I knew that if I missed the landing, the swim would be much longer, and maybe I wouldn't be allowed to finish. So I swam harder. Every time Dawn corrected north, I died a bit inside, because I knew that I wasn't making forward progress, I was just holding steady. This is when things get tough, you have to have complete faith in your pilot, and I was having some doubts. But I was not done by any stretch, and I was really feeling strong and enjoying the challenge. Earlier I had been thinking that the swim was a bit boring, and I was wondering why I did these silly things when a Swim Quest vacation would be so much more social and fun...but this challenging part, this is what marathon swimming is all about for me. The test, 'man vs. nature', 'man vs. himself' no one can do it for you, just you and your mental and physical strength. Now the swim was getting interesting. Another hour of hard swimming and it seemed like I could 'just swim in"! Why wouldn't Dawn let me just finish! For some reason she wouldn't, and then she turned us completely south and put Barb in the water to show me the way in. There was a man in a wetsuit at the water's edge who wanted to shake my hand and congratulate me, and poor Barb kept intervening saying, 'don't touch her until she clears the water' so I ran the last few feet out of the water and raised my arms in celebration, picked up a rock, and shook the man's hand.

It was done, 8:36 hours. I had in my head that anything under 10 hours would be a victory, so eight and a half in those conditions felt great! I had a great crew. I can't thank them enough for volunteering their time and helping clear my unfinished business in the Santa Barbara channel. The swim had everything one could hope for, beauty, meditation, wildlife, fear, doubt, and also success. I needed the hard parts to make me appreciate the rest.

Thank you Santa Barbara Channel Swimming Association for letting me have a second go, Thank you Dawn and Rayel for being supportive pilots, thank you Kris and Barb for your kindness and willingness to give me two days of your life, and thank you Michelle for coming straight off Swim the Suck to a day of work and then a day observing! Amazing effort all. I wasn't as trained as I had been in preparation for my first attempt last April, but I was trained enough to be reminded why I love marathon swimming and I was trained enough to make this swim enjoyable even under difficult conditions.



Sent from my iPhone