OUTDOORS   AUGUST 17, 2015 9:43 AM

San Luis Obispo man becomes first to swim across Estero Bay

HIGHLIGHTS

57-year-old completes 14.4 miles in 8 hours 18 minutes

Support crew saw dolphins, a whale and lots of jellyfish

Conditions were good

BY DANIELLE AMES AND MATT FOUNTAIN

The Tribune, San Luis Obispo

After eight hours and 18 minutes, 57-year-old Dave Van Mouwerik of San Luis Obispo emerged from the sea Sunday and was greeted by a cheering crowd after becoming the first person on record to swim across Estero Bay.

Wearing only a Speedo, a bright yellow swim cap and a pair of goggles – his leathery skin flushed red from the cold water – Van Mouwerik stumbled onto shore, his legs exhausted after his marathon 14.4-mile swim.

"I'm profoundly relieved that it's over, it was a pretty good swim," Van Mouwerik said. "I trained a lot for it and I had a great crew. Both my boys were there."

The journey began at 6:27 a.m. Sunday morning at China Harbor, north of Cayucos, and ended at 2:45 p.m. at Spooner's Cove at Montaña de Oro.

Dave Van Mouwerik swims Estero Bay

Van Mouwerik was followed by The Bonnie Marietta, which navigated the swim; the boat is owned and piloted by Mark Tognazzini, owner of Morro Bay's Tognazzini's Dockside restaurant.

There was a support crew of five on the boat, including Van Mouwerik's sons Kyle, 24, and Adam, 21, as well as an observer from the Marathon Swimmers Federation who documented the swim and ensured that it was accomplished according to international

marathon swim rules.

Van Mouwerik's crew paralleled him on a paddleboard for direction. He ate thickened sports drink goo, and drank sports drink every half-hour, the bottles of food and drink were attached together with a rope and thrown out to him in the ocean.

Conditions during the swim were good; the water was mostly calm despite slight choppiness in the middle and pockets of very cold water. The crew experienced a few dolphin sightings, a whale and lots of jellyfish.

Van Mouwerik said that the first few hours of a swim tend to fly by quickly, and the second half can drag.

"When you get out into the ocean, it's a solo event," Van Mouwerik said. "It's an adventure."

Van Mouwerik came into swimming later in life.

"You go through life not really knowing what you want to do. Then I found this passion," he said. "Something got into me."

Van Mouwerik, a swimmer for 34 years, has previously completed four marathon swims, three in California and one in Sweden. His longest swim was 21.3 miles, crossing Lake Tahoe from the south to the north.

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WE'VE BEEN TRYING FOR A LONG TIME TO LIVE UP TO HIM, AND AT THIS POINT WE'VE JUST GIVEN UP.

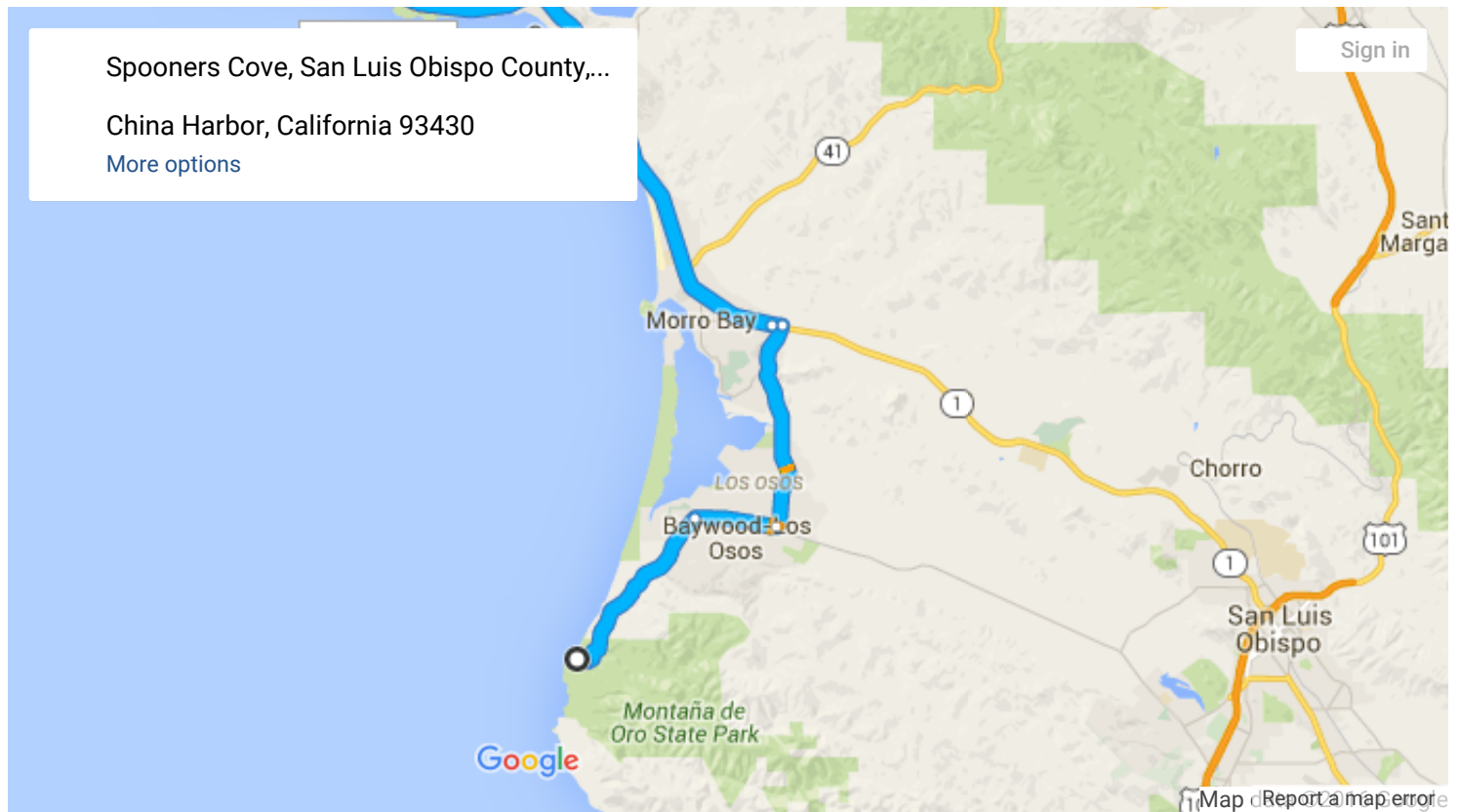Kyle Van Mouwerik, marathon swimmer Dave Van Mouwerik's son

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Two years ago, Van Mouwerik stopped swimming when his son Kyle was stricken with a life-threatening illness; he viewed Sunday's swim as "a marker of my reawakening to swimming, after a long hibernation." Van Mouwerik's son has since mostly recovered.

Van Mouwerik said he's been training for roughly a year at local gyms, Sinsheimer Pool in San Luis Obispo and in the ocean at Avila Beach. To prepare for the swim, he went to bed about 8 p.m. the night before after eating a meal of pasta for the carbohydrates.

Van Mouwerik is planning a freshwater swim in May in Arizona; he's relieved he won't have to worry about marine life.

"We've been trying for a long time to live up to him, and at this point we've just given up," joked his son Kyle Van Mouwerik.

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