

Swimming duo first to cross The Wash in 40-years

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Robert Howlett and Steven Riches complete The Wash swim challenge (3268170)

Two daring distance swimmers have become the first in around 40-years to successfully cross The Wash.

Rob Howlett and Steven Riches, both from Lynn, swam from Skegness to Hunstanton last Sunday and set a new record after completing it in just six-hours and 19-minutes.

The duo spent two-years planning and preparing for their Wash cross, and said "we finished around 10 minutes ahead of schedule and around 330 metres further up the beach than predicted".

But, when in training, the pair suffered a set back when Mr Howlett had to undergo a spinal fusion operation and was unable to walk for three months after an old back injury resurfaced.

He said he had "resigned himself to the fact the swim was not going to happen" until Mr Riches, who was still recovering from a major hernia operation, went to visit him and spoke about slowly building up their training.



Robert Howlett and Steven Riches complete The Wash swim challenge (3268166)

Speaking about the swim, Mr Howlett said: "For the first three hours the wind farm seemed to be continuously looming over us, never seeming to get smaller which was creating a feeling of "Have I got this wrong?" and "Are we actually getting anywhere?"

"But then it seemed to happen suddenly as the tide began to pull us south, the cliffs of Old Hunstanton grew in size and the wind farm seemed to disappear behind us.

"Two-hours later the homeward straight feeling had entirely disappeared and the feeling of "Will the coast ever get any closer" had firmly taken hold.

"But then, as with the wind farm, suddenly we could clearly see the beach along with the shape of people.

"The swells dropped off to a beautifully calm sea in clear waters and suddenly the bottom became clear gradually becoming shallower until finally the beach."



Robert Howlett and Steven Riches complete The Wash swim challenge (3268162)

In 1974, both Tina Spry and Michael Read swam across The Wash in around eight-hours, and Mr Read took on the challenge twice more, completing the Skegness to Hunstanton length in seven-hours and 52-minutes.

“Strong currents, shifting sand banks and unpredictable seas was the response we had received when we first enquired about swimming The Wash in 2016,” said Mr Howlett.

“The general response was that The Wash has only been formally swam under Channel swimming rules by four people and has not been swam in 40 years for a few reasons, too risky and logistically difficult to pilot a swim across.

“Two-years of planning and a feeling of job done. The skippers had nailed the plan perfectly and professionally.”



Robert Howlett and Steven Riches complete The Wash swim challenge (3268158)



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