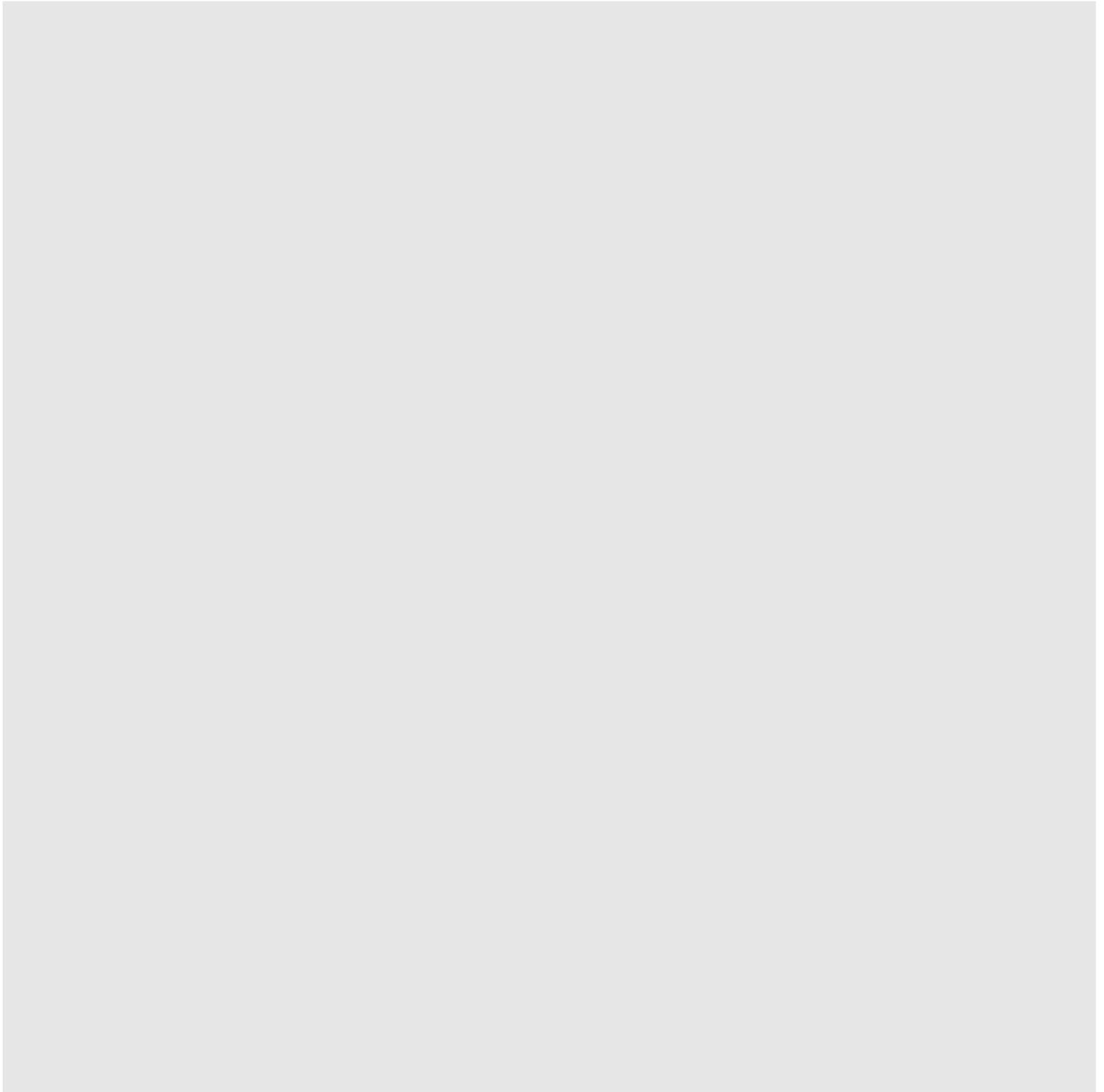


http://www.omaha.com/livewellnebraska/plus/lincoln-swimmer-is-first-woman-on-record-to-cross-/article_45bbf755-cd66-55ad-bf72-e587a2c2c0e0.html

Lincoln swimmer, 52, is first woman on record to cross 21-mile St. Lucia Channel

By Kelsey Stewart / World-Herald staff writer May 23, 2018



Molly Nance

PAUL NANCE



Molly Nance, 52, became the first woman to swim the estimated 21.2 miles between the islands of St. Lucia and Martinique. The Lincoln woman has been swimming since high school, but only got back into the pool for exercise within the last decade.

PAUL NANCE



A couple of years ago, Molly Nance didn't know exactly where St. Lucia was. After dinner with friends who had just vacationed on the island, Nance looked for it on a globe.

When she spotted St. Lucia — and the nearby island of Martinique — one thought popped into her head: I could probably swim that.

"Mountain climbers look at mountains and think, 'I can climb that,'" the 52-year-old said. "Swimmers look at (water) and think, 'I could swim that.'"

Last week, Nance became the first woman on record to successfully swim the roughly 21-mile channel. The rules of her swim were simple: You cannot get out of the water, and you cannot rest.

"It's exciting for me," Nance said. "I think it's pretty cool that a 52-year-old woman from Lincoln, Nebraska, of all places, is the first one to do this tropical marathon channel swim. I feel really proud to be able to say that."

The Lincoln woman swam competitively in high school, but didn't pursue the sport in college. She took it up again in her 40s. She's since done a handful of marathon, open-water swims.

Four years ago, Nance attempted to swim the English Channel — which is the same distance as the St. Lucia swim. She made it about 8 miles before nausea got the best of her.

Nance first got into the water off the coast of St. Lucia at 4:45 a.m. The water, still dark, was speckled with blue lights — what Nance guesses were jellyfish. As she entered the warm water, she felt strong and comfortable.

"It felt like I was swimming through stars," Nance said. "Seeing the sunrise and the way the clouds lit up underneath in bright orange and pink, it was incredible. No matter what else happened, I had that morning."

For the swim, Nance was accompanied by her husband, Paul, and a small support crew. They followed her in a boat and kayak.

The only gear she could have was a standard swimsuit, cap, goggles, ear plugs and nose clip.

Every half hour, her crew tossed a bottle filled with a carbohydrate drink to her on a rope. But the ocean swells were so large, she had a tough time keeping anything but coconut water down.

By the time Nance hit her eighth hour of swimming, she wasn't sure she would make it across the channel. But she would only give up if her support crew forced her out of the water.

"The island wasn't getting any closer," she said. "I would say '10 more minutes, 10 more minutes' and eventually I would feel better."

Nearly 14 hours after she started, Nance landed on Martinique. It was about 2 miles west of where they intended to land thanks to a strong current pushing her west.

"I was so exhilarated and so overwhelmed at the same time. It was an incredible feeling," Nance said. "It was so much of a team effort. We accomplished this goal that I really didn't know we'd be able to do."

Nance hopped in the boat and took the 4-hour ride back to St. Lucia, where she recovered and rested for a few days before heading home to Lincoln.

Nance had an official observer for the swim and the records will be sent to the Marathon Swimmers Federation. Evan Morrison, the federation's co-founder, said Nance is the first woman on record to complete the swim. He said two men reportedly have made the swim, too.

Athletes often will tackle a swim that's off the beaten path, but they won't officially document it, Morrison said.

"There are so many unconquered bodies of water available to the adventurous spirit," Morrison said.

Nance said it was an incredible experience, and she hopes it might inspire others to achieve their goals.

"If this swim can help other people achieve the challenges they're facing or a goal they have in mind, I'm happy about that," she said.

Kelsey Stewart

Kelsey covers health and fitness for The World-Herald. Follow her on Twitter @kels2. Phone: 402-444-3100.