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[SARAH FERGUSON IN HER OWN WORDS](#)

A Record-Breaking Swim from a Truly Genuine and Inspiring Woman

The Easter Island swim has been the toughest I've done, and I really had to dig deep. On March 15, as dawn was still to make an appearance, my team and I readied ourselves for this momentous challenge that lay ahead. Around me, people gathered with messages of well wishes and encouragement and the sound of AC/DC's 'Thunderstruck' filled the air. It was one of those moments where I tried not to think too hard about what I was about to do and just dived into the water and began, leaving behind the echoes of shouting and cheering.



The look of a record-setting champion for the ocean. Photo: Wofty Wild.

The water was warm and Sarah Houston and I quickly got into a rhythm. The first kilometre was quite choppy and I was still trying to settle my nerves. That combination made me feel nauseous and the need for a suppository was calling. I began to feel seasick with the rising swells. Only ten minutes after my departure, the harbour had closed because of the increasing swells which means I had made it out just in time. To my relief, the nausea passed as I continued with each stroke; my watch keeping me informed of my stats. After reading my speed of 16 minutes a kilometre, it then decided to stop working altogether. I was being challenged to new heights as, being my instrument to gauge my progress in the water, I now felt a bit lost without it.

I was given a suppository profilactively at my first feed anyway and it settled me down nicely. John started out on my left with the kayak and after the first feed switched to my right. We learnt in Hawaii to shift sides of the kayak at each feed to allow my breathing to be bilateral which it usually is, but sometimes I will favour one side especially if visibility gets poor. The yacht was further behind me to the right.

The swell was massive coming from behind me and a bit side on with the wind creating chop and the rebound of the breaking waves off the cliffs causing more turbulence to swim against.



The coast of Rapa Nui was no joke. Photo: Wofty Wild.

I could feel the water change as we neared the first corner of the island. I was out in the big, deep blue depths of the ocean which was mesmerising- a bit like being suspended in space. As we approached closer I was graced with the sight of a giant pinnacle rock protruding from the water to my right. Behind it was a smaller island (2km from shore.) I later discovered that this was the iconic island used for the bird man competition. Communities would live on the side of the crater at the cliff edge in small stone houses with tiny entrances. They would enter backwards into the entrance

to avoid letting any spirits into their home. The people of Rapa Nui have a strong spiritual tie to their ancestors.

The men would then have to swim to the island, climb up the cliffs and collect a bird egg and then swim back on a handmade raft with the egg intact. The winner was crowned ruler of the island for a year until the competition would happen again.

I rounded the first leg of the swim in record time. The conditions were a bit wild, with the swells and wind but nothing too crazy. John had switched with Tavu and Konui by then and was back on his 2nd shift. The rotating of the paddlers every hour really helped me keep track of time as I no longer had my watch. As I rounded the first point, the yacht pulled up closer to cheer and whoop and on my next feed Sarah H played Thunderstruck on her speaker. It gave me a real boost to start the long slog to the next point.

The start of this 25km stretch came with its own terms; the heat of the day and swimming against the current. However, aside from the heat of midday, I was experiencing headaches and taking strain from the salt burning my mouth. This was tough because it was not something I am familiar with and didn't expect. I had been putting Vaseline in my mouth and lips every second feed to try and combat it, but nothing seemed to help. The lysterine would help for 10 minutes before the salt got to me again. Rounding the first point I swam straight into a current. I could see the bottom and pieces of seaweed and microplastic as well as small fish swimming under me against me- with the current. Konui was on his shift and there was loads of manky foam around me and that did not set a great tone for what was to be my toughest slog ever.

About 3 hours into the long grind and 7 hours into the swim I was taking strain. I still had 75% to swim left to go but I was feeling tired and the salt was really getting to me. This was not a good sign, but quitting was not an option. Sarah H noticed my strife and jumped in with me to try and cheer me up for the next 3 feeds. It was a welcome distraction. She did her usual underwater craziness pulling faces and making me smile inwardly. It helped but I could not return the smile as smiling was too painful. Wofty and Marta managed the feeds while Sarah H swam alongside me and on John's 3rd stint on the kayak he summoned Sarah H back to the yacht to assist as Rentia was man down with sea sickness. Eish!



Sarah Ferguson staying hydrated during the swim. Photo: Wofty Wild.

I did maths 24 in my head, sang songs and thought of the finish. I tried zoning out but unfortunately that is something that happens naturally and cannot be forced.

We were now further from the coast in the big blue which I love, but it was impossible to switch off due to the long rolling swell, small wave chop and of course the salt. The coastline appeared endless, but it was beautiful as we passed a crater, some cliffs, caves and it was breathe taking.

In my battle to stay focused and try and disassociate from the salt water in my mouth, I came up with strategies to distract myself. One of which was going through the alphabet and thinking of each person in my life who I am grateful for and the impact they have had. I had planned to break the alphabet game into 3rds so I could do some for each stretch of coastline, but I needed to use it all on this long stretch! I also became aware of all the beauty that surrounded me; the waves breaking on the cliffs, the volcano, the navy boats that checked up on me and being able to look back on how far I had already come. It pushed me through the slow, hard grind.

Finally we started nearing the second point- Poike. The wildest point and one which everyone on the island feared the most. There is no road access to that point, only foot and cattle paths, and so no way to evacuate to the land. This was a wildness that I truly love. It was windy, and the sea had a mind of its own, reminding me of Cape Point; the wind pumping, the waves crashing, the boulders. I thrive in these conditions and was so excited for the challenge of rounding this section. I could feel the ocean change as we got closer and closer. The water got wilder and choppier, waves thumping against the cliffs.

I picked up a gear and was in my element. John was whooping with the energy of the water all around us and it meant a lot to me when he shared how incredible it was for him to watch me swim through this phase of my journey.

We rounded Poike well before nightfall and I then knew that I was on track to finish the swim in under 20 hours. Stoked. I had successfully passed through the 2 toughest corners of the island, 1 more to go and then the homeward stretch. I knew the next stretch would feel long and hard and so

tried hard to disconnect. I sang more songs and thought of the finish. The sun was taking its leave and I was losing focus again. The moon was half full which was really pretty allowing me to rely on the silhouette of the Kayakers rather than their headlamps which I could not see as they were on the back of the head and not the side. My mouth was still taking strain.



A below-water shot capturing Sarah as she swims under the moonlit sea. Photo: Wofty Wild.

When it finally got dark, the phosphorous was difficult to see but every now and then you could see sparkles and it was beautiful. John jumped into swim with me around 11pm for a welcome distraction. I was fading again and having his somewhat thrashing style next to me was a comfort. Tavu was paddling by my side slow and steady with an occasional 'yeehaa'

I was alone again after 30 minutes with John accompanying me in the water and aiming for the final corner. On John's next shift there were whistles from the yacht and we were told to swim away from the cliffs as there was storm brewing and we couldn't take a chance of being knocked into the cliffs. We did a 70 degree turn out to sea!

I could feel the change in the water as I neared it and knew I was getting closer

Around this time I had already gotten sick and brought up the contents of my stomach. By now I had relied on two suppositories to keep me well enough to continue. I had been stung about 3 times by jelly fish and could feel the chafe under my right armpit. The stings became a welcome distraction from the salt in my mouth. At some point I remember looking at the yacht during a feed and seeing it swaying from side to side at about 80 degrees. I was so stoked not to be on the yacht.

The final point was sharper than the other 2 which meant we did not hug the coast but rather went just past the point and then took a sharp turn to the left. There was a car on the side of the cliffs shining their lights at us which was another welcome distraction knowing that people were following on land as well as in the ocean.

I was swimming at 3.3km/hour which meant about 4-5 hours to go. As I rounded the final point it was 12km to go. I was taking strain again and asked Sarah to jump in and swim with me for a bit. I thought she would swim for 3, maybe 4 feeds and then get out as I knew she was tired. She had

worked relentlessly between feeding me and the crew as well as getting on and off the zodiac in massive swell. This was not an easy task and Tavu actually cut his shin deeply in the transfer process and needed Rentia to do doctor duties.

I had delayed asking Sarah as long as possible, but I needed her now. There were probably about 10km to go when she jumped in. It was amazing to have her by my side. This was probably the hardest that she had to work to keep me motivated as I endured through some low points.

SWIM AGAINST PLASTIC

BREAKING RECORDS AND INCITING CHANGE

On the 15th of March 2019 Sarah Ferguson became the first person ever to swim the entire perimeter of iconic Easter Island/Rapa Nui. Her record-breaking feat was conceived to raise awareness about plastic pollution and inspire the world to rethink their plastic use.

- SWIM STARTED AT 8.07AM**
ON 15TH MARCH AND
FINISHED AT 3.15AM
ON 16TH MARCH
- FROM HANGA ROA TO
HANGA ROA IN RAPA
NUI, EASTER ISLAND**
- TOTAL SWIM DISTANCE
40 MILES/63.5 KM
IN A TIME OF 19.08**
- FIRST PERSON
TO COMPLETE
THE SWIM**
- 12,000 CALORIES
BURNED**
- 3 JELLYFISH
STINGS**

**EASTER ISLAND
'Rapa Nui'**

Presented By:
Footprint™

Organized By:
PLASTIC™ OCEANS **brea he**

Find out more at swimagainstplastic.com

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#SWIMAGAINSTPLASTIC **CROWD** **WOLU MANGA** **Toku** **RAPA NUI DREAM**

The final results. Design: Crowd.

We could see the lights of Hanga Roa and the crew were amped. I tried not to look too closely as the lights are deceptive and I actually missed the natural moonlight and darkness.

About 4km from the end, my throat was closing, and I was struggling to breathe. Sarah tried to call from the kayak to the yacht but we only got the message through on the next feed. We asked for a broncho dilator and glycerine. Alarm bells were ringing in the crew's heads and we were so close to finishing. I was being cautious as I knew the previous swimmer had failed the swim due to salt inhalation and had to be airlifted out.

The bronchodilator arrived and I took two puffs. There was no change and I knew then that it was ok, I could finish, as tough and as uncomfortable as it was. I told myself this was just like any other training swim.

Rentia came with her stethoscope on the next feed which I refused. I just wanted to finish now. I tried to enjoy the process but the salt was too distracting for that.

With 1 mile to go I was chomping at the bit to head inland. I was shown the 3 bright lights we were aiming for and made a beeline towards them only to be whistled back to the kayak. We had to keep straight due to rocks. I was not convinced but Sarah urged me to trust the kayakers. I reluctantly followed.

During the final stretch John swapped out with the local paddlers who are experts with the shores so that they could safely navigate me over the shallow reefs and rocky sections. The next thing a fishing boat appeared out of nowhere and kept shining their light on me and having a fat chat with Konui and Tavu in Rapa Nuin. We didn't understand a word and I just wanted to swim. It was very disorientating with the lights in the water. John was now in the water with Sarah and I for the home stretch and was also trying to keep me focused and calmly guide me into safety. I learnt later that the navy wanted to abort the swim and take me to shore in the boat as the harbour was still closed, but thankfully John persuaded them otherwise.

Eventually we realised that Tavu, Konui and the fishing boat were waiting for the set to pass before shouting 'go go go!' We sprinted in through the break safely to the calm harbour and I finished my last few strokes butterfly a promise I'd made to do for Josie, Sarah's daughter but I also did it for all the children.

I could hear cheering and shouting as I got to the end. John and Sarah embraced me and Tavu jumped in to celebrate. It was an incredible moment which lasted too briefly. The swim was not over until I got out the water.

Konui's dad was the first to embrace me and I was overwhelmed with leis and lanyards from people showering me with congratulations; it was a beautiful moment. There were people everywhere! I hugged Tod and Julie from Plastic Oceans and briefly spotted Mark from Plastic Oceans Chile before being whisked away by the doctor for routine check ups

Unfortunately, the moment felt too brief as I was whisked away in an ambulance to get examined. I would have loved to have experienced that time on the shore for a little while longer, to truly relish in its goodness, but I respect the doctor's decision to ensure safety first. They put a space blanket around me even though I was hot and into the ambulance I went. All alone. I was taken to emergency and unceremoniously undressed into a gown before bloods were taken, a drip given and vitals monitored. Everything was perfect and the doctor was happy. I nodded in and out of sleep waiting for my team to arrive with fresh clothes and celebrations. It was surreal.



[Easter IslandSwim A](#)