

Solo swimmer aiming to smash ultra rare Plymouth sea challenge

JAK BALL AUGUST 25, 2020



After completing a solo swim across the English Channel, a man from Plymouth is to next take on a challenge completed by just a handful of people - and he doesn't have to travel far to attempt it.

Neil Brinkworth, founder of Plymouth Open Water Swimmer, is aiming to become just the fourth person to swim the 14 miles from [Eddystone Lighthouse](#) to [Plymouth Hoe](#).

Completing the challenge has been a dream of Neil's since he was a boy and finally that dream is set to turn into a reality.

Speaking of the attempt, Neil said: "I have always dreamt of swimming this ever since I was a young boy.

"I was brought up on stories about the Eddystone Lighthouse and the Eddystone reef, tales about ship wrecks, strong tides, storms, sea monsters and about the disasters that struck the lighthouses over the centuries."

Despite hearing those tales, Neil is still keen to take on the challenge, which is believed to have only seen three people successfully complete it.

In 1914 Jabez Wolffe was the first person to swim from the Eddystone Lighthouse back to Plymouth Pier.

Jabez was known as the unluckiest channel swimmer in history, he made at least 22 attempts of the English Channel and never succeeded.

Marguerite Pike attempted the Eddystone swim, but she was defeated by the tide, as was Kevin Crabb and Brain Palmer.

In 1977 Christine Sifleet successfully completed the swim in a time of 10 hours 1 min 30 seconds and the last person to successfully complete the swim was Sharon Price in 1987, with a time of 6hrs 56mins.

Both swimmers have been helping Neil plan this swim by providing him with in-depth insights into the challenges he might face.

To give Neil the best possible chance of successfully completing this 14-mile swim he has amassed a fantastic support crew.

The swim will need to conform to the Marathon Swimming Federation (MSF) Rules.

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For the swim to be verified by the MSF, Neil will only be allowed to wear a swim hat, goggles, swimming trunks (no wetsuit) and is not allowed any outside assistance, apart from receiving his feeds from a feedline.

His main support crew will consist of Andrew Butler and Sian Lane who have both crossed the Channel and are established long distance marathon swimmers.

They will ensure that Neil stays hydrated and feeds during the swim as well as providing motivation and support.

Tom Thorpe, from Ocean City Kayaks will be providing safety cover throughout Neil's swim. Tom is an established kayaker in his own right, in 2019 Tom kayaked around the coast of Ireland unsupported in 26 days.

Tom is well conversed with the tides and currents around the Eddystone as he would regularly paddle out to the Eddystone Lighthouse after work when training for his around Ireland challenge.

The backbone of the swim, which wouldn't be possible without a boat, is being supported by Plymouth's Ben Kellet from the InDeep Dive and Charter boat centre. Ben and his team have a wealth of experience and knowledge of the waters around the Eddystone, they are regular visitors to the Eddystone Lighthouse and Reef.

With so many swimming groups on the rise and the popularity of swimming growing Neil and a few friends set up Plymouth Open Water Swimmers (POWS), for those swimmers who want to take their swimming to the next level and focus on long distance open water swimming.

Plymouth Open Water Swimmers regularly swim at Firestone Bay all year round including the cold winter months. Their warmth and friendship keeps them going throughout the winter, they have adopted the saying 'nothing great is easy' a quote attributed to Captain Matthew Webb the first person to swim the English Channel in 1875.

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