

Newbury swimmer on the crest of a wave after swimming Bristol Channel

Joanne Jones braved the tides to cross 13 miles from Penarth to Clevedon

A NEWBURY swimming coach has become only the second woman since 1982 to swim across the Bristol Channel.

Joanne Jones, an open water swim coach and writer about all things swimming, braved the tides to cross the 13 miles from Penarth pier on the South Wales coast to Clevedon pier in Somerset on September 27.

The 27-year-old completed the epic challenge in just five hours and 27 minutes, a time which is awaiting verification as being the fastest yet to complete the challenge.



Mrs Jones, who was on furlough when she decided to take on the task, said: "I needed a project and I decided that a 13-mile swim was exactly what I needed to do when the rest of the world was going crazy.

"I couldn't control the pandemic, but I could control training and have something to focus on."

After a false start on September 12 when a broken boat halted plans, Mrs Jones got a call from the boat pilot a few days before the swim saying the weather would be doable for the Sunday.

Mrs Jones, who is the GB 500m champion for ice swimming, continued: "I was really nervous because it was getting cold and windy, and until Saturday lunchtime I almost cancelled.

"I'm so pleased I didn't because it was brilliant weather and I had a brilliant swim.

"I didn't expect the time – I told my dad who was on the boat that if I'm close to five-and-a-half hours to shout at me.

"The Bristol Channel is the second biggest tidal range in the world, and the pilot managed to get me in the right place to ride the tide, which really helped."

While on furlough, Mrs Jones also set up her own swimming company – Swim With Jo – following her dream and aiming to share her love of open water swimming with like-minded people.

Mrs Jones said: "I always said I'd set up coaching when I had the time to do it, and I suddenly had the time.

"In open water swimming I like that there's no chlorine and that you feel like you've got somewhere, and there's more scenery and nature.

"I do swim in pools in a controlled environment, but there's something about open water that's so special and relaxing and it feels like more of an accomplishment when you've done it.

"That's what I love to share with other people through my coaching.

"I've also noticed that more and more people are swimming in the Thames, or Speen Moor, and they weren't realising the differences between pools and open water swimming.

"I got scared that people would make mistakes, so I thought I can do something about this and help people."

Mrs Jones can be reached through her Facebook page, Swim With Jo.