

## **Lake Geneva 18th August - 19th August 2026**

"Deciding to swim this lake should be left to the imagination", was a phrase I remembered when I flew over Lac Léman (Lake Geneva to non locals) on our inbound flight to Geneva Airport. I had made this trip almost exactly a year previously, when I was invited to crew for a friend of mine attempting to swim his own Lake Geneva crossing. Sadly his heroic swim fell foul to the weather: a storm blew in through the night, of apocalyptic proportions, and scuppered the final quarter of his swim. The swim is 70km long, end to end, with breathtaking views of the Alps on either side. Like any swim, the weather plays its part and the temperatures of the lake can fluctuate from a tepid 22c to a very chilly 13c. The swim is twice the distance of the English Channel, and some of the most seasoned Marathon Swimmers have had their swims cut short... through no fault of their own.

To date, only 17 people have completed the swim, for good reason... and deciding to swim it (and raise money for a cause close to my heart) was suddenly very real and nauseatingly scary.

In 2024 I swam the English Channel. I had somehow managed to complete that swim in Force 6 conditions with the help of my brilliant crew of Channel Swimming Legend Sally Minty-Gravett (MBE), my wife, and the expertise of my pilot, Eddie Spelling. I finished that swim in a little over 12 hours and, while tired and overjoyed to be one of only circa 3,000 people to have managed it, I felt I could have swam on... don't get me wrong, it was a very tough swim and I said to Alice (my wife) that it was the hardest thing I had ever done. But retrospectively, I felt I needed to tackle something bigger and be brave doing it: finding a charity that really spoke to us would be key, and undoubtedly would bolster the motivation and inspiration needed for the massive hill I would have to climb in terms of training and preparation. I hadn't been cold in the English Channel and I mercifully didn't swim any of it at night... night-swimming was something I felt I might struggle with. Swimming in the middle of the English Channel in the pitch darkness is not for the feint-hearted, especially when the sea is anything but flat.

For context, The English Channel is 33.3km, and a swimmer has to battle with wind, waves, tides and all that the open sea throws at you... 33.3km is the shortest distance you actually are likely to swim, the distance covered is obviously much much more due to the elements. Lake Geneva is a static lake, 70km end to end and fresh water, which is less buoyant than the sea: therefore harder (a hill I will die on). Both swims have to be completed under Channel Swimming rules, which is no wetsuit (just swim cap, togs and goggles), no touching the boat at any time and, of course, no getting out. My crew would throw me bottles of fluids (carefully curated and planned before hand) and the odd solid bit of food to keep my spirits up: "Them's the rules".

I needed to swim for a cause greater than simply completing the swim. So raising money for my son's SEND school - who were in much need of funds to help with all manner of things, including equipment, mini buses and pressing, a soft play room, was the clear choice. Money that would have a direct and consequential effect which would help many families and kids in the local area. For those who don't know, my son Odie has a very rare condition called "Mowatt Wilson Syndrome" (there are currently only ~300 people diagnosed globally); which means he has severe global developmental delay, he may never talk, and has complications with his gross motor skills. Certainly, the volume of training required for Lake Geneva would mean I needed all the motivation I could get: this was it.

I had signed up in 2025 prior to crewing for my friend on that storm filled night on the lake, and I simply hoped I would have a better day, weather wise than they did. I was not disappointed. Far from it, more anon.

I wrote my over arching training plan just after I got back from that trip with some trepidation; I had chatted to them and other swimmers who had both successfully and unsuccessfully swam the lake and had a strong idea of what was required. I of course backed myself, because why wouldn't you going into a swim of this magnitude? You couldn't be half arsed or worry that it was impossible; over confidence or an attempt at having 'blissful ignorance' had to be the way forward. The adage of controlling only what you can control and leaving the rest to chance certainly rang true. If I had a night on the lake as I had witnessed first hand crewing, I could only hope I would make as good an account of myself as they did. My controllable factors were being

on top of my training and ensuring I was in the best possible shape both mentally and physically as I could be. I knew I was on the faster end of swimmers in the context of marathon swimming speeds: but speed is utterly irrelevant when crossing channels and lakes; completion is the only thing that matters, as wind, tide, currents and the elements all play their part. That being said, I worked out that based on my anticipated speed and all being well, the swim was likely to take somewhere around 24 hours... and planned accordingly.

My weekly volume started moving up quite nicely (peaking at 32km per week at this stage) and I was feeling pretty solid about it all, the plan was being stuck to. I booked a few events midway through my training that I had thought would be useful. First up was "Swim the Night", where you swim a mile on the hour every hour for 24 hours, outdoors at Guilford Lido. I had been told that the small hours of this event would be the test of my mettle, and they were not wrong. Luckily, I had a strong cohort of channel swimmers swimming with me and we all motivated each other along: the swimming was the easy part (I held 23 minute miles quite consistently, and then had 37 minutes to dry off, get dressed, have some tea and cake, stay warm and then undress). Obviously, the hard part was getting back in throughout the night, having started the event at 7am, the cold and fatigue at hours 20-24 was pretty gruelling. I did find, however, that as soon as I was in the water and swimming, I felt pretty good... which was reassuring.

After this test, the training ramped up a little (peaking at 40km per week). I had to do a "6 hour qualifier" (which is a swim for six hours in water under 16c) as I had planned, in June, another Round Jersey swim as part of my overall road-map. I first swam around this iconic island in 2023. It is a tide assisted 50km swim around the stunning Channel Island, and this time I was fortunate enough swim with a small pod of dolphins for my final hour or so. As magical as this was, I actually blame them for narrowly missing out on the overall record on the swim: I was six minutes off the long held course record, completing this swim in 9hrs and 32mins. It was of course a beautiful and welcome distraction. This was also the coldest swim I have ever completed, the mercury just stayed under 15c, although the air temp was an utterly glorious 25c. It was a super day out, only made better by the fact that I again had Sally Minty Gravett (and pilot Gary) crewing me on.

This Round Jersey swim actually served as my qualifier for Lake Geneva. All swimming associations that ratify swims have certain criteria a swimmer needs to meet before they are allowed to swim. In The English Channel and Round Jersey (CSPF / JLDSA) it is a "6 hour qualifier" as I have outlined above. For the LGSA (Lake Geneva Swimming Association) it is a 10hr followed by a 7hr on consecutive days in water below 18c. Thankfully, they can also accept recent ratified swims as qualification. They did in the case of my swim: I think the time, distance and temperature all played their part. This was music to my ears as the idea of a 10&7 (what Channel Swimmers would call this), filled me with dread. Not least because summer 2026 was unfolding to be the hottest on record and the temperatures of the lakes seemed to be getting worryingly high for the time of year.

Historically, Lake Geneva rarely gets above 22c, especially in the middle of the Lake (the deepest) where one might swim when crossing the length. It is worth mentioning that the "Petit Lac" which is the Western narrow part of the Lake is also the coldest section of it. I think this is due to Alpine run off into a shallower basin, and swimmers who finish their swim going into this part of the lake have suffered considerably. Famously, Neil Gilson (who holds the overall record on the lake in a blistering 22hrs and 9min) swam himself unconscious with hypothermia while navigating this section of the lake at night, on his only unsuccessful attempt. He was ok, his excellent team managed to pull him from the water in time before true disaster struck.

The summer of 2026 as everyone now knows, was the hottest on record for Europe. My local lake at which I had planned on doing some very long training swims, was reading 26c by early July. When I tried to swim a weekend of some long swims there (what Channel swimmers would call "a 7&6"), I blew up... it was far too hot for me. Most recreational swimmers would love that sort of temperature. I had been planning and expecting to get very cold on my Lake Geneva swim, especially at night when the air temperature plummets: this combined with extreme fatigue, makes it the hardest part of the swim for most swimmers. All my Winter and Spring swimming acclimation was ensuring I was comfortable swimming in very cold water. I parked the thought mentally of being "too warm", as that surely was a preposterous idea in an Alpine Lake, and

finished my training at the ever reliable (heated to 19c) Sea Lanes 50m pool in Brighton. Here the water doesn't get much above 23c in the high summer due to wind chill, as the pool is on the beach and gets wind-swept continually, keeping the temperature constant and lower than you would imagine.

(For those that want to know, my peak training weeks prior to tapering for the big swim was 55km, slightly under what I had planned; but I favoured intensity in the pool over all out volume due to the heat of the lakes. The final fortnight of training included 10 days of 100x100m, all at a 1:40 per hundred interval).

My crew assembled, which included my mum Becky, who agreed to come to look after my son Odie while we were on the water swimming. We hired a car and were staying on the Swiss side of the Lake (North side) at a catered B&B I had found through the Lake Geneva Swimming Association (LGSA). Travelling with an entourage of helpers and crew, I wanted to make sure we were all comfortable, with as little for me to worry about as possible; largely so that I could focus on swimming the BFL (Big F\*\*\*ing Lake, which is what we had started to coin it). This turned out to be the best decision I could have made. Helen and her partner Peter, who ran the B&B, were utterly amazing: included in the deal was transport to and from the start and finish (it's a long way); and their hospitality was awesome. We had a view of the lake from their house and it was a constant reminder of just how big this lake really is...

Upon arriving we waited patiently for my pilot (Eric) to message and give us an indication of when we might swim. Swimmers book a window of time when attempting any swim, and the understanding is that you can swim at any time during that window: and when it comes to the English Channel, a lot of the time, that means some swimmers don't swim at all due to weather. As glued as I was to my weather apps, Eric obviously has the final call, knowing the lake as well as he does. We got the call on the Monday that it was a likely swim starting Tuesday into Wednesday, from Villeneuve (Chillon Castle, specifically) which would mean finishing the swim in Geneva itself. The pilot decides based on the weather if you will swim West to East or East to West. It was looking like we were swimming the more traditional route (East to West). Game on.

Feeds were made, kit was assembled and the morning of the swim we drove early doors to meet the boat. We were also meeting Ben (Barham) at the start, who was my final crew member. He volunteered to come and help on the swim, I had never met him before but he was one of the founders of the LGSA and I bit his hand off to come and join us. He was such brilliant value to the team: he was extremely chipper and fell into the crewing ritual alongside Sally and Alice with utter ease. We found the boat "Freedom", embarked and I quickly got changed into my violently pink lucky trunks. Alice lathered me up in a second layer of sun cream and readily applied vaseline to all the spots you might imagine a swimmer would chafe... at 8:40am I jumped into the lake and swam to the shoreline beside Chillon Castle, cleared the water, and waited for my instructions to start.

The hooter went off just after I had decided to do something I had done on the English Channel, and stuff a small pebble down my trunks. For luck. I have a small brown pebble as a memento from my 2024 English Channel swim, courtesy of Shakespeare Beach in Dover, that I carried for the entire swim. As soon as I jumped in and started swimming, I was greeted by a feeling of real warmth to the water and an "oh sh\*t, this is going to hurt" moment. I think the water temperature was somewhere around 26c, and I hoped that the combination of being rested from tapering, and the enormity of carbs I had eaten in the days leading up to the swim would mitigate how uncomfortable I thought I might be swimming in temperatures that I was unfamiliar with. I was wrong. Although I wasn't nearly as uncomfortable as I had been in the hot lakes in the UK, every stroke hurt. Unlike any of my other colder long swims, where I felt I could get into an easy "all day" rhythm, Lake Geneva was telling me that it was going to be a tricky 24 hours at the office.

I parked the feeling of discomfort and swam feed to feed, counting to 100 strokes over and over. I had imagined in all the sleepless nights leading up to the swim the phrase: "just swim until the sun goes down and start again; then when the sun comes up you ought be near the end". This sentence had been my mantra for the months prior: it would mean the swim would equate to roughly 24 hours of swimming. About 6 or 7 hours in, the discomfort from the heat peaked and I was starting to wish the boat would have some sort of malfunction, hitting some flotsam, or a

crew member having uncontrollable vomiting / diarrhoea; and the swim would be aborted as a result: saving face from me actually wanting to stop. It was now that I removed the pebble from my trunks, and let it fall to the bottom, superstitiously thinking I was hurting because I had 'stolen' a pebble from the beach next to Chillon Castle. Ben had sent me some of Chillon Castle's rich and murder-y history in the days leading up to the swim, and I was panicking that the castle and therefore the pebble were haunted. My head was doing anything it could to feel better. That being said, the day passed quite quickly, and I remember reaching 10.5 hours of swimming, the sun was low on the horizon, the temperature was dropping and Sally said to me "that's half the lake swam!". Doing the maths in my head, I thought to myself "that's good, I am right on target, although the back end will be slower", and I was beginning to feel more and more comfy as the air temperature dropped... it was a big relief. I lifted my head and said to Sally that I was finally starting to believe I could swim this swim, and the confidence in myself was growing again. Although it was sometime around late afternoon / sun-set that the wind started to pick up, and with it, a small unpredictable chop I was swimming directly into.

It is hard for me to remember a lot about swimming through the night on this swim. It has already condensed in my memory to a few hours of swimming, when in fact it was ~9 hours of darkness. Earlier in the summer Sally had invited me to swim an English Channel Relay with her and some of her Jersey friends. As luck would have it, we started this relay mid afternoon, which meant swimming through a very black and wavy night. One of my hourly sessions was around midnight, swimming through shoals of jellyfish and blackness; after which I realised that while it took me a lot of internal struggle to get into the water, I actually was perfectly fine, and knew I had created a lot of self-made noise and fuss about very little. Swimming at night in The English Channel I felt was actually cathartic; this was a relief, of course. I felt pretty good through the night from what I do remember on Lake Geneva, as my muscles eased slightly from the heat of the day; although no one had warned me about the hallucinating... the boat had grown a sort of 'gauze' around it, which I reconciled in my mind to be something that the Captain Eric had put up to mitigate the wind. Of course there was no gauze: and the fenders on the side of the boat were not my crew dangling their feet in the water. As I swam through the night, being tapped by the chop and wind repeatedly in the head became quite annoying, and looking back was actually a good distraction from anything else that was going on with my body or the boat; but of course, at the time it was just making me grumpy...

I had envisaged a 24 hour swim, or even a time under this, and as the swim went on and the wind remained staunchly head on, I begun to do more and more maths in my head. This was based on time and distance covered that my crew were relaying to me. I knew we were slowing down considerably. The sun eventually came up, which was hugely welcome, however with it I could see just how much further we had to swim. We reached the Petit Lac during the night (from about 17 hours in) and this final section of the lake is over 20km, so when the sun came up and I saw how much further we had to go, my mantra of "swim to sunrise and you are nearly there" was dashed. The constant wind from about 10 hours into the swim had slowed me down hugely. Of course, fatigue also played a massive part in the decrease in speed; I can look back now and just be grateful the lake gave me very little weather-wise knowing how others had fared in previous years. At one point I was swimming under 2km per hour; for context my fresh all-day pace is somewhere around 4km per hour... so when Sally told me the speed I was swimming, I got more grumpy, as with 10km to go I knew we had another 5 hours at that speed, putting my swim into the 28hr realm. A quick and emotional pep talk from my wonderful Alice emboldened me and on I swam, this time with renewed vigour to up the pace as much as I could manage.

I continued to hallucinate through the morning, thinking the reflections on the water from far away buildings were ducks floating nearby in the water, and my long vision playing tricks on me... Although I did now know we would finish, despite it being a longer swim than I had wished. Time is irrelevant I kept saying to myself, just grind it out.

I had also only brought enough 'regular' feeds for 24 hours. I feed every 30mins on a three types of liquid feed that my crew rotate through. These coupled with a baby pouch every three hours, were my staple feeds for all my swims. I had also packed hairbo sweets, flapjacks, bananas, sturgeon and paracetamol, and the nectar that is flat coca cola: it's caffeinated sweetness can be a god-send for swimmers at the end of their rope. So when we reached 24 hours, Alice, Sally and Ben improvised with some remaining feed that they had held back (they had deliberately under-

diluted some feeds seeing which way the wind was blowing), and offered me coke. After which at 9am (just over 24hrs into the swim) I had a "breakfast of champions" which was coffee and a flapjack, and it all felt very civilised and normal.

Sally got in and swam with me for an hour as we moved towards Bain de Paquis, the beach you swim onto to finish. For the past year I had been asking her to make sure she finished the swim with me; and she would tease me back, saying that she would not be able to keep up... So when she was about to get in with me, I asked if it was because I was swimming so slowly; which came out all wrong in my tired state to the tune of a snarky "Oh you can keep up with me now can you?!!". I didn't mean it to come out like that, and she forgave me. I think. She effortlessly cut through the water while I struggled on. She is not called the "Jersey Dolphin" for nothing.

The water in the Petit Lac is beautifully clear and felt so much cooler, all of which was extremely welcome: although weirdly, it is like a desert. You can see the bottom from miles out, as it is extremely shallow, but there is not a single stone, fish, weed or anything you would expect in a body of water like that. I found it strange. A barren beautiful landscape, with impossibly good visibility, blue crystal water all around... yet my hands swimming in front of me were the only objects in the water that I could see, except the landscape of the sandy / muddy beige lake-bed.

I approached the finish: the Jet D'Eau spurting some 300m into the air now being my guide home. This is a water feature Geneva: close to the harbour, that turns on at 9am and jets a massive column of water into the air. Swimmers have seen it from 20km+ out, and at that distance it never gets closer. We had a few km to go at this point, as we neared the finish, the desert-like bottom of the lake turned into a more traditional lake, with weeds, fish and general pond-life now reassuringly visible. Sally got in once more, and we soon navigated under the buoy ropes of the beach itself; the ground rose up under my feet and we were there. The relief.

Walking up the beach, I realised that lots of people were watching me: this strange pale man in bright pink shorts stumbling up the beach, unsteady on his feet. One of Odie's godparents has an aunt living in Geneva, she had been waiting patiently for us to arrive for about three hours... finally seeing us nearing, she had told the lifeguards we were approaching. The lifeguards then relayed on the tannoy to everyone enjoying the hot summer's morning on the beach that some bloke from England had been stupid enough to swim the 70km length of the lake and was finally finishing after 27 hours and 35 mins... people were applauding me and cheering. It was surreal, extremely emotional and a memory I will treasure for ever. Of course, Odie was on the beach to greet me with my mum, (and my friend Christine from Brighton who was out there on another swimming excursion of her own)... it all felt bonkers and brilliant as I collapsed in a heap and cried into my robie.

Looking back now, it was a swim of three halves. The day, night and the following morning. All of which seem like very different swims. The day being quite efficient, although painful. The night feeling quite easy, although slow. And the following morning just being a gentle grind, surrounded by some of the clearest water I had ever seen. The first half the lake took me 10.5 hours and the second half took 17 hours: the main difference being the wind that got up and in my face from about 10.5 hours in. I am so proud and grateful to everyone that made this happen, from my amazing crew of Sally, Alice and Ben; to Eric the pilot and his team of Olivier, Claire and Emma. You were all amazing... Not forgetting my incredible Mum making the voyage with us to make sure her and Odie were just as much part of the process as land support.

This swim puts me currently within the top 150 longest swims of all time, and also I am now part of the exclusive 24 hour club, for swimmers that have swam for over 24 hours under Channel Swimming rules, in which there are under 200 swimmers. That being said, the disparity between my swim and the top ten longest swims in terms of time is staggeringly large.

The important part was that we utterly smashed my fund raising target for Odie's SEND School. I had wanted to raise over £15k, but to date we have reached a wonderful £40k... this was thanks to the generosity and kindness of so many people. I created a WhatsApp group for the event and the 150 members throughout the 27hrs and 35mins of the swim kept the Just Giving Page alive, all while championing me the whole way: they pushed the fund raising link out across all social media channels, and for that I am extremely grateful. I am looking forward to seeing the fruits of

my labour, and everyone's donations at the newly redeveloped soft-play room. I know it will make a huge difference to so many children at the school and that fills me with pride and gratitude.

I am still recovering from the swim. My shoulder decided on cue to start hurting 24hrs into the swim; my body clearly rejecting still being in the water and swimming outside of what we had originally agreed. And I am pleased to say that I am no longer hallucinating, although that did take a few days to go away after the swim. And before anyone asks "what's next", my answer to my wonderful wife's relief is "nothing". Well, 2027 is at least a year off long swims. Much love to all of you and thank you for reading.