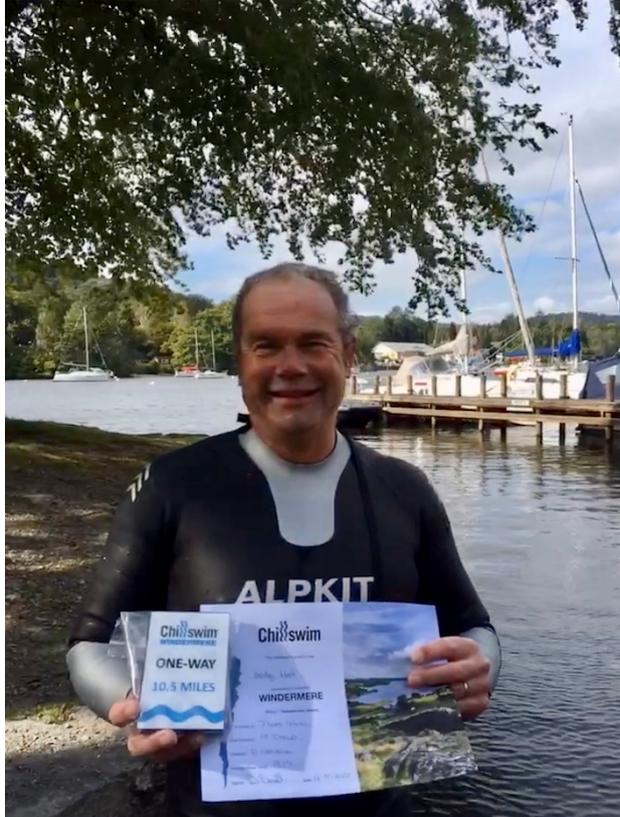


Lane 1 Takes On Windermere One Way!



A Tractor Not A Maserati!

Let me say at the outset, I am not a great swimmer! In the pool, my swim time for 1k is just under 30 minutes. I am an overweight middle aged ex rugby player with dodgy knees! I am not built for speed, but I can do endurance. Probably best to think of me as more like a tractor than a Maserati!

I have done some endurance events. I cycled Lands End to John O'Groats (100 miles a day for 10 days) some years ago and more recently followed it up with the 'reverse diagonal' - cycling from Cape Wrath to Dover (85 miles a day for 12 days).

When it comes to swimming - 10 years ago I couldn't swim a length front crawl. I am pretty much self-taught. However, I love open water swimming and the headspace and sense of achievement it creates. Over recent years, I have done a number of events and in 2019 completed the 5.25 mile Coniston End to End Swim.

Joining DWOTC

I first got introduced to DWOTC when I had a swimming lesson at the Royal Victoria Dock with Dave Poland. He was very encouraging and said "...I had a lot to work on!" That was in summer 2019 and following Dave's advice, I joined DWOTC and found what a friendly bunch everyone was. I really enjoyed the Sunday and Wednesday night training sessions - firmly rooted in Lane 1!

Over Christmas 2019 and a bottle of 14.5% Merlot, I decided to sign up for another challenge. - something I had been thinking about for a couple of years - the Windermere 10.5 mile End to End Swim.

Windermere is a busy lake with lots of boat traffic and ferries crossing. You can't really rock up and hope to swim it!

There are two ways to swim the length of Windermere. There is the annual event with c. 200 swimmers where each swimmer must have their own support canoeist (cost c. £350) or guided solo swims through Chillswim (cost £600). Given that it had taken me almost 5 hours to swim Coniston, and that Windermere was twice that distance, I really didn't think I could honestly ask anyone to spend 10 hours in a canoe looking at my ugly arse in a wetsuit! So I booked the guided solo swim for mid-September.

The thought of spending so long in the water also got me worrying about the cold. I treated myself to an Alpkit Silvertip thermal wetsuit (£200). A great buy. If you don't know Alpkit, check them out. They are an independent outdoor adventure company (also make Sonder bikes) and 'B Corp' certified so have good sustainability ethics.

My 'Eye of the Tiger' Training Programme!

In my dreams, I had these visions of a well-disciplined 'alcohol free' training programme with me shifting loads of 'drinking muscle'! The reality was slightly different! I woke up early one morning three months before the big swim in a cold sweat - the 'fear of failure' finally triggering me into action!

Lockdown didn't help either - with virtually no training possible between the end of March and May. Swim events I had planned to build up mileage all got cancelled. I had booked the Ullswater 7.5 mile End to End Swim in mid-July as a critical test and confidence builder - this got postponed due to the pandemic.

When swim venues such as St Andrews and Leybourne Lakes reopened I got with my training programme to swim five times a week, with at least a two hour swim each weekend. By August, I was swimming 15 to 20 kilometres per week.

My friends joked that I had better be careful not to hang about at the lake, otherwise Greenpeace might turn up and try and roll me back in!

My biggest fear was cramp. One day in the pool at Virgin Active, I decided to try and do an overtake in my last length and that extra kick sent my calf muscle into spasm. My calf completely locked for about 45 seconds and it was all I could do to make it to the side of the pool without drowning - I would have had serious problems if I had been in the middle of a lake! My calf was bruised and painful for about 5 days afterwards. If that happened during the Windermere swim, it would be game over.

I did a lot of research on cramp and how to avoid it. My big find was Precision Hydration 1500 which is a very strong electrolyte drink - you start preloading the day before a big event. It really worked for me.



Ullswater 7.5 mile Swim

The 7.5 mile Ullswater End to End Swim then got rescheduled to September - to be exact to 4 days before my attempt on Windermere! Did I really want to swim 18 miles in 5 days? Would trying Ullswater weaken my chances of completing Windermere? If I failed Ullswater, then what?

Over a glass of 14.5% Merlot, I thought about it and then decided 'sod it', just get on with it!

I arrived up in The Lakes the night before the Ullswater swim, feeling nervous but excited. I did registration the night before so that there would be less hassle in the morning. Given the COVID-19 situation, the event was strictly swimmers and safety/event staff - no spectators allowed.

Arriving bright and early in the morning, the wind had whipped up and I could see waves across Ullswater. It wasn't a shock when the swim start was put back an hour. The organisers then decided the end to end crossing would not be possible for safety reasons.

Instead, a one mile loop was set up for us to swim seven laps. It was tough. I don't do bilateral breathing and the outward swim to the first buoy was almost impossible without taking in gulps of water. The race buoys were being flipped in the wind and the wind generated current was unbelievable. Whilst you got the benefit when the wind and waves were behind you, the legs into the wind felt doubly difficult.

Psychologically, it was hard. Swimming loops is boring compared to swimming the whole length of a lake. By 5 miles, I was very tired but could then start to count down towards the finish.

After several hours hard toil, I completed my seven laps. I was one of the very last swimmers out. The organisers were packing the event kit away. However, they also said that many swimmers had struggled with the conditions and got out way before completing the 7.5 miles.

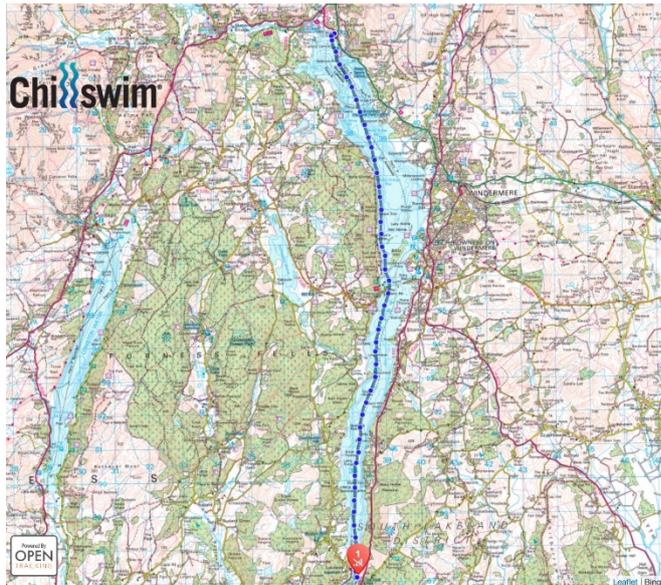
It had been hard, but it was job done and I was relieved to still be on track for Windermere in 4 days' time. I had a very large glass of Merlot that night and fell asleep in the armchair!

The next day I went to watch the mass Windermere One Way Swim. The event was called off due to the weather. On reflection, I had been lucky to

do Ullswater the day before and in selecting my attempt on Windermere as a solo guided swim.

Windermere 10.5 mile Swim

Four days later, I was up at 5.00am and spurred on by many messages of encouragement from friends – ‘come on Ash you can smash this!’ Kit ready, porridge consumed, well hydrated. I met my pilot at 6.30am.



The normal convention is to swim Windermere from south to north to take advantage of the prevailing south easterly winds. However, my pilot said the forecast predicted a switch in wind direction, so a north to south swim might be best. There was a calculated risk but in his experience the forecast was rarely wrong (plus it also avoided an hour's boat ride to the other end of the lake to start the swim).

In terms of feed stops, it was agreed to stop every mile to refuel. My chosen fuel was bananas (to help fend off cramp), Clic energy bars and Precision Hydration electrolyte mixed with water.

It was a beautifully calm morning. Hardly a ripple on the water. We had to delay the swim start by 30 minutes to allow the rising sun to burn off the mist sitting on the water. The pilot needed clear visibility to see the headlands to navigate.

After the build-up of several months, it felt good to slip into the water and start swimming. The first couple of miles slid away. I got into my own little bubble and completely lost sense of time. Windermere is a beautiful lake and there were a couple of landmarks that I knew to look out for to judge my progress.

It felt good to pass Bowness which is broadly halfway. I still had no perspective of time as I had agreed with the pilot for him not to tell me. I wanted to focus on getting this done, keeping an even pace and not worry about the clock.

Suddenly, I was aware that the flag on the pilot's boat had changed direction with quite a strong wind. The forecast shift in wind direction had

happened and my pilot had called it right. However, this is also created quite a chop and around the 6 mile mark I experienced some very rough water. At times it was difficult to keep on the same line as the pilot boat. I swallowed a few waves.



After battling with rough water for what seemed an endless time, I was at the 8 mile mark. Psychologically, knowing this gave me a positive boost and belief that I could do this. It was now a matter of keeping going, avoid cramp and counting down the last 2.5 miles.

When I finally entered the final mile and could see the boats at Fell Foot, it felt good. However, I knew it was too early to claim victory and the end just kept being a bit further than I hoped.

I was elated to reach the shingle beach and dry land. You can probably see my delight in the photo!

Post Swim Review

At the end, my pilot said he had been impressed by my relentless pace and that I had kept smiling throughout. I hadn't been fast, but I had swum each mile maintaining the same pace and stroke rate as the very first mile. He reckoned I had finished so strongly that he thought I could have easily carried on and that maybe I should think about doing the 21 mile two way Windermere swim in the future!!

I am not a great swimmer - but doing the Windermere End to End was a good affirmation that ambition doesn't have to be limited by ability! I was far from the fastest person to make this swim but maybe not the slowest either and, if I was, who cares? Not bad for an 'old git' like myself!

My eventual swim time was just over 7 hours 30 minutes - well within my predicted 9 ½ hours based on the Coniston swim. However, the most important statistic, due to the fantastic generosity of so many people, was that I raised over £6,500 for CALM - a great charity combatting the shockingly high level of suicide in young men.

Thank you for reading this piece. I hope that it encourages you to take on a challenge outside of your comfort zone. You can achieve whatever you believe!

Ash xx



PS – someone asked whether my family were worried about me doing this crazy swim? They weren't but as you can see Roma the puppy, pictured waiting for me at the lakes edge, was!