

If somebody had told me two years ago that one day I would swim 20k solo to rottenest I would have just laughed. Coming from a background of middle distance pool swimming, doing any sort of event over 8 minutes to me was considered totally outrageous! What sort of lunatic would compete in an event like that!

The decision to do the swim only came after injury meant that I couldn't run or ride, so I figured I might as well challenge myself in the ocean instead. And that I did!

Race Day

The alarm went off at 3.45; I was wide-awake in a flash, very excited about the day ahead. Quick lucky pancake breaky, bathers on, sunscreen application #1 and off we went. Arrived at Cottesloe beach at around 4.45 to find hundreds of nearly naked nervous bodies strutting around in the dark. It was not a warm morning so the original plan to have a quick warm up dip went very quickly out the window. I grabbed my ankle strap, applied more sunscreen and wool fat (horrible stuff!), had a few photos taken and before I knew it the first wave of solo males were off. 15 minutes to go!! Surprisingly I wasn't feeling that nervous, just in a bit of disbelief that the tiny dot I could see on the horizon is where I would hopefully be around lunchtime. A few good luck hugs and off I went. There were only 50 female competitors in the race so the start was pretty tame. I found Matt in the kayak and my support boat very easily and quickly so that was challenge number 1 out of the way, now it was all up to me! I had planned to stop for food and drink every 30 minutes. The first food stop went perfectly to plan, the second wasn't so smooth.... I stopped to see Matt with a very stressed look on his face when he said 'Nic the kayak is filling with water' before I could utter a word he was over with my lollies, PowerAde bottles and gels floating out to sea! We would have been no more than 3k into the race at this stage and I honestly thought my day was over, how could I possibly swim the next 17k without a paddler! My fantastic support boat was over in a second to rescue Matt out of the water. I was still bobbing around in the water very close to just bursting into tears when Dad yelled out 'Nic just keep swimming..... Follow that guy on the yellow kayak! So that I did! In true Dory style..... 'just kept swimming' After a while I thought Bugger this..... I'm just going to swim on my own! This was all great for about 5 minutes but after that I started to get a little anxious out in the middle of the ocean on my own surrounded by hundreds of 6 metre boats. 10 minutes seemed like 2 hours but soon enough my boat found me again, pulling the dodgy kayak behind. Up to about 12k I was feeling great! Thinking to myself 'this is going to be a walk in the park, what's everyone going on about!!' Half an hour later was a totally different story. The ocean was starting to look very ugly, with very strong winds and a huge swell. At first I was actually enjoying the bumpy ride, but after a while my stomach really started to hate me! Believe me the taste of regurgitated PowerAde is not pleasant! At that point the swim turned from being quite enjoyable to absolute hell! The next 8k were a real struggle; I couldn't keep any food or drink down. I wished I had kept a count on the chucks actually because I think it may have been a world record attempt! Around 14k was the toughest stage, speaking to Dad after the race he actually thinks I was swimming on the spot for about 20 minutes at one point, that was very demoralizing! From then onwards I got into a bit of a routine that went something like 10 strokes... chuck..... 20 strokes..... drift 100m North..... chuck! I was pushed so far off course by the wind that I actually ended up in the ferry channel and nearly got cleaned up by Rottnest Express!

When I reached 400m off Rottnest I still was not sure that I would make the island, partly due to the fact that I was seeing little black dots!

I can't even begin to explain the feeling when I hit the island. I had spent the last 3 hours seriously doubting whether I would make it, so the feeling to have actually got there was amazing.

I will never forget that moment of stumbling across the finish line.

'The pain won't last forever but the memory will' Very Very true!

Although the race itself did not go very much to plan and took a lot longer than I had hoped, I have learnt a lot more about myself from this 7 hour battle than I would have from a 5 and a half hour perfect race. And I think that is really what a race such as this one is truly about, pulling through the tough times and staying on top mentally when things don't seem to be going your way.

I have so many people to thank for their support in helping me fulfill my dream of swimming to Rottneest.

My fantastic skipper Tony was amazing, he had a real tough job out there in those conditions and dealing with the two wallies in the back of the boat was a challenge too I bet!

My two paddlers (well sort of!), I couldn't have made it without you. Getting all my food and drink to me on time and staying positive throughout all the tough times.

Most importantly, your support and encouragement during the swim made such a difference, without you both I seriously doubt I would have been able to push through such a tough day.

I can't forget Mum the Manager, getting up at some ungodly hour to smear sunscreen and wool fat onto me, you were great!

Last but defiantly not least super coach Paul. Thank you for all the effort you put into me, for your fantastic program, brilliant advice and guidance from afar, that made it all possible.

'Will you ever do it again? Everyone is asking.

Absolutely!