

FIVE YEARS WITH *H2OPEN*

OPEN WATER SWIMMING

In the five years we've been publishing H2Open, **Lisa Williams** went from a one-mile wetsuit swimmer to a 21-mile non-wetsuit English Channel swimmer.

PART 1

Lisa Williams is a hoarder – at least as far as H2Open is concerned. Back in the autumn 2015 she posted a picture on Twitter of her complete set of magazines, starting from Issue 1. We therefore decided to ask about her open water swimming journey and why she hung on to her H2Open copies.

Six years ago, Lisa realised she was working too much, socialising too hard and not doing enough exercise. Remembering that she'd loved swimming as a kid she went along to her local pool to do a few laps – after something like a 15-year gap from the water. There she saw an advert for West London Penguins, a masters swimming club, and decided to sign up.

At this stage, open water swimming hadn't even crossed her mind but early in 2011 she signed up to do a one-mile swim with Human Race at Dorney Lake.

"In those days, open water swimming wasn't so popular, you could sign up just a couple of days in advance and do the swim," she says.

At the swim, she picked up a copy of H2Open Magazine and liked it so much she ordered the back issues she'd missed and has been reading it ever since.

A year later she came to our Open Water Swimming Show (called the H2Open Day back then) where she attended presentations by Colin Hill (founder of Chillsim), Mark Bayliss (who was preparing for Arch to Arc) and Nick Adams (President of the Channel Swimming and Piloting Federation and who first sparked her interest in swimming the English Channel).

"I remember scouring the pages of H2Open looking for new and bigger events. I did



Chillsim's first ever Length of Coniston and Henley Swim's first 14km Bridge to Bridge. I then saw an advert from Aspire about their Channel swimming relays and thought, 'that could be interesting'.

Lisa completed her first relay – a six-person one-way crossing – in 2013. In 2014 she went to do a four-person two-way Channel relay: an effort that took more than 24 hours.

Meanwhile, back in June 2013, one of her best friends died at a young age from breast cancer. Lisa decided that she wanted a really big challenge that she could do in memory of her friend and also to raise funds for the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity. With the relays behind her, the logical step (sort of) was to tackle the English Channel solo.

Her open water swimming suddenly became a lot more serious. She went on swimming camps with Strel and Swim Trek and followed those up with a two-way Windermere swim and a two-person length of Lake Zurich swim.

"By this stage, swimming had become a major part of my life. All the people I now know, I met through swimming. It was amazing to read about people in H2Open, and then meet and swim with them."

Lisa expected to swim from England to France in around 12 hours but the crossing didn't go quite as planned. As so often in the Channel, the weather worsened unexpectedly mid swim and the wind direction and tides became more challenging than she'd hoped for. The real problem though was that one of her shoulders packed in after 10 hours of being battered by the ocean.

In Lisa's mind, getting out wasn't an option. If she could only use one arm then she would do single arm front crawl. Simple. Except single arm front crawl is a lot slower and less balanced than the standard stroke. And when she got tired of single arm front crawl she switched to backstroke. Anything to keep going.

"I couldn't give up," she says. "I had invested so much time and money. I'd hardly seen my boyfriend or family in months; I even missed a friend's hen do. But most of all, I couldn't face doing all the training again."

The swim eventually took 17 hours and 19 minutes, and she raised £10,369 – more than double her initial target. In total (including her relays) she has raised more than £20,000 for charity through Channel swimming.



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So what next?

Lisa didn't swim for months after crossing the Channel but that was because of the injury rather than a lack of interest in the water. She was also happy to take some time doing things she'd missed out on while training.

"I don't think it's a good thing to jump into the next thing straight away," she says. "You need to reflect and consider your options. For me,

there's not much appeal now in doing 10k swims or similar but at the same time I don't want to go back to the huge amounts of training and expenditure required for really big swimming goals. I certainly considered quitting swimming completely but in the end I've decided I want to swim the Gibraltar Strait. It's a nice next swim to do. I also hope I can speed up a bit – all that long distance training slowed me down."

LISA'S HIGHLIGHTS FROM FIVE YEARS OF H2OPEN

I just spent a few hours going through the back issues to remind myself of which articles inspired me and which ones I enjoyed, and this is only the short list! It is amazing really that when I first started reading them all those years ago I knew no one in the sport and was inspired by people's stories or what they wrote and now, looking back, many of the people featured have become friends or people I have met over the years.

In Issue 1 there was an article on Going Strait (about crossing the Gibraltar Strait). It inspired me to apply for a slot in 2012 but I was too late. However, it remained on my bucket list so I applied again earlier this year and I have a booking for April 2016.

I've always enjoyed the 'Ask the experts' section and in my earlier days many questions I wanted to ask myself were answered.

One of my favourite articles was Issue 3 about Martin Strel. I was lucky enough to meet him in 2013 in Slovenia when I was on a Strel trip, and subsequently won his DVD in an H2Open competition. He is someone who I am inspired by for the reasons he does his swims.

I first heard about Lewis Pugh in your Issue 8 and have since followed him through Twitter and Facebook, read his book and attended one of his talks. He's another inspiring person who is using swimming to do great things for the world.

I found that I had marked Issue 8 p. 18 about the Catalina Channel... Maybe back then it was something I was thinking of doing. Who knows? One day!

Also in Issue 8, I had circled 14 swims in the calendar, which I went on to do. I was obviously having a spurt of interest that year in open water swimming.

After my two-way relay I started concentrating on my solo Channel swim and went back to read all the Channel articles to ensure I hadn't missed any vital advice from anyone... so I re-read issues 6 (the Channel special), but also 11, 15, 22 and 24.

I had also marked Issue 10, "Shoulder the burden". Something I have always been conscious of was injuring my shoulders and so must have marked this to remind myself to look after them!

Issue 12 was the one that I saw the advert for the Channel relay and to that I emailed Andrew [Ogierman at Aspire] and there started my Channel journey! Who knows why it was that particular issue I chose to

do it given Diabetes UK had also often advertised but I suspect it was the article about Pauline (who I met this year on SwimTrek LDTC) and her charity Channel relay.

One of my favourite articles was the one in Issue 18 titled 'Bombs Away' [about removing unexploded bombs from rivers in Cambodia]. This story was really fascinating to me to understand more about why other people learn to swim. While it's usually for enjoyment, health or to prevent drowning this was for another reason entirely and it was nice to read about something completely different.

Issue 21 had an article on what to eat before a morning swim. It was good to read this as I had always struggled to eat food or keep it down early in the morning before swims and had opted to stop eating beforehand and just eat lots the night before, this article helped me to understand that it wasn't hindering my swimming and was okay to do.

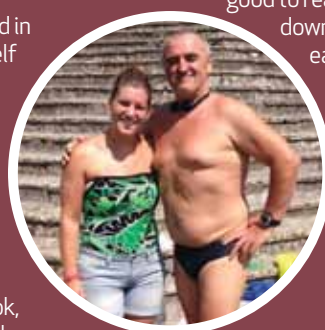
I loved the story 'Accidental record breaker' in Issue 25 [about Brenda Fisher, a 1950s Channel swimmer].

In Issue 27 I really enjoyed hearing about Matthew's story 'Swimming with Sound'. It was then a real surprise to find myself swimming with him at Camp Eaton just a short time afterwards and hear about it from himself.

I have been inspired by many peoples' journeys and stories over the years and when reading back through all the editions that my bucket list of swims has generally come from reading about other people's experiences. It has been lovely over the years reading about friends and people I have met such as Vicky Miller, Tony Marshall, Pauline and Wendy.

I also remember at the first H2Open day in April 2012 hearing from Colin Hill and his challenges with organising the Olympics open water. I then remember thinking about him on the day as I watched the 10k in the Serpentine. I also thought of Cassie Pattern that day too. I had been sat next to her during the talks and chatted to her about her Olympics and her sadness of not being selected to swim for London 2012 and that she was thinking of leaving the country during the Olympics as she wanted nothing to do with it – it was so great instead to see her be part of it and commentating in a boat next to the swimmers.

More generally, I've enjoyed reading all the articles about the ice swimmers and those that swim all year round. This is always something I have a huge amount of admiration for, it really is an amazing thing to do and not one I could ever see myself being able to do. Although I swim outside all summer I still find it cold getting into a pool!



Just because you're an outdoor swimmer doesn't necessarily mean you want to swim the English Channel, says **Kevin Goodall**

PART 2

Kevin Goodall is another subscriber who's been with us since Issue 1. He describes himself as a "rambler" of the swimming world and he's always puzzled that people invariably ask him when he's going to swim the Channel when they learn he takes the occasional outdoor dip. "To me, this is like asking a man who's just walked a couple of miles to a country pub whether he's planning to climb Everest," he says. "They wouldn't ask him why he didn't just walk the same distance on a treadmill in the gym yet they are surprised that I should choose to swim in a river over the pool!"

What have you done and how have you changed as a swimmer over the past five years?

The biggest change in the last five years is that most of my swimming used to be done pacing up and down an indoor pool like a bored Orca at Seaworld (though not as gracefully). Much as I had always loved open water swimming it was limited to summer holidays, the odd riverside picnic and an occasional SwimTrek weekend in the lakes. Now I am an exclusively open water swimmer and swim skins in my local lake all year round. I am also a member of a swimming club for the first time in 30 years and enjoying all the social benefits that that brings.

I still swim a casual breaststroke but it's hard not to be influenced by the inspiring mix of other swimmers I meet every week at the lake. As a result, I have been on swimming trips, completed an Aspire night swim, taken up winter swimming and even dabble with a little bit of front crawl when no one is looking.



I'VE KEPT EVERY ISSUE NEATLY IN BINDERS, WHICH GOT A BIT SPOILT WHEN YOU CHANGED THE FORMAT!

I may not be a better swimmer than five years ago but I'm certainly a much happier one.

Can you highlight any particular features or stories from H2Open that have inspired you or prompted you to take on a particular swimming challenge?

I'm a rambler of the swimming world and love swimming much as other people enjoy walking in the countryside. As such I'm most inspired to swim in different unique, quiet and special places rather than races or mass events – though I did complete an Aspire night swim this year. I've enjoyed the iconic swims series and, although I haven't done any yet, a few have made it to my bucket list. I have also made a note of some of the great locations you have featured and which will hopefully be holiday destinations in the future.

The winter swimming articles (the ones in Issues 25 and 26 by John Coningham-Rolls spring to mind – "you note the stabbing pain over every part of your body but you don't panic!") were helpful motivation for keeping me swimming though the winter and ditching the wetsuit.

Are there any stories you particularly remember enjoying?

Well there was an article in issue 29 featuring the Open Water Clubs in which I featured! That was good: my mother enjoyed it anyway. I was also Letter of the Month in Issue 3.

I have a short memory but I enjoy reading about classic swims and places – so Simon Murie's Byron Swims series was a good read. That kind of iconic and historic thing appeals to me. I'm also a big fan of winter swimming so am enjoying tips and articles on that now we are in the season. I can't believe it's taken so long to feature a cake article. I'm enjoying that and have been lucky enough to have tasted Katia's biscotti after a winter swim!

I also like to read the reviews of swimming related books and equipment. One of the nice things about OWS is that you don't need a lot of expensive equipment to do it but occasionally a great must-have product comes along: everyone I know seems to own a Dryrobe.

Anything else you'd like to say about H2Open? (apart from the occasional difficulty in being able to access your digital subscription)

Ha - well I mainly read the print version but I like to have a quick peak at the digital one to see if any of my open water swimming buddies appear. It's amazing how often you come across someone you know! What to say? I enjoy the Magazine. I was a subscriber from before Issue 1 (I saw it plugged on a SwimTrek email if you want to thank them) and have stuck with it so you must be doing something right. I've kept every issue neatly in binders, which got a bit spoilt when you changed the format some years ago!

I like that you continue to cater for all types of swimmers which I appreciate must be difficult. On dry land you have different magazines for sprinters, joggers, triathletes, fell runners, marathon runners, rambles etc. With open water swimming everyone is lumped together (which is another of the nice things about the sport). Bet you wish you hadn't asked now!

