

SUCCESS WITH THE AIR INDIA CHANNEL RELAY

CHANNEL CROSSING WAS A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE AND A DREAM COME TRUE.

After having to abort three solo swims and one swimmer not getting a chance to make an attempt due to bad weather conditions for the English Channel crossings, this success was a blessing in disguise. More so for Smruti and Shruti, who missed the solo crossings by 3-5 miles, a typical case of "so near yet so far".

D-day was decided based on the tidal information available from Pilot Mr. Andy King, whose boat Louise Jane was scheduled to escort the swimmers. It was to be 08th September, 2007 and the team reached the Dover Port Marina and boarded the boat Louise Jane greeted by Andy and Keith at 0700 Hrs. The day started with ample good luck on the boat with Keith showing us a picture he had brought along for the swim – that of our God Lord Ganesha. Andy too was wearing his lucky white T Shirt. There was lot of excitement on the boat and a determined team with a simple will to succeed. The boat made its way to Shakespeare Beach from where the swim would commence. The swimmers followed the following sequence.

1. Darshan Deshpande
2. Shruti Limaye
3. Smruti Prabhu, and
4. Mitali Varadkar

Darshan started the swim on the hooter from the boat at 0725 Hrs. It was a pleasant day and the weather looked fine. The change of swimmers would take place after each hour of the swim. Darshan was followed by Shruti who was followed by Smruti and Mitali thereafter who would again be followed by Darshan. The speed was slow initially owing to swims against the tides. At 1046 Hrs the swimmers entered the South West Shipping Lane. The team saw two porpoises swimming side by side at about 1145 Hrs. The speed gradually improved during the second set of swims and the team entered the separation Zone and then North East Shipping Lane at about 1303 Hrs. The swimmers encountered some pretty large swells owing to vessel traffic. There was lot of cheering (read shouting and screaming) on the boat which kept the atmosphere lively.

The first glimpse of the French skyline could be seen at 1530 Hrs. The team left the North East Shipping lane at about 1715 Hrs. While the team was busy calculating the remaining distance, Smruti went in next and covered an incredible distance of 2.9 miles in that hour. This left about 3 miles for Mitali, who till then had been covering the maximum distance during her swimming hours. It was thus left to Mitali to land on the French shore at Cap Gris Nez. The Dinghy carrying Shruti and the Indian Flag was launched at 1916 Hrs and Mitali swam alongside the Dinghy and stepped on the rocky shore of Cap Gris Nez at 1943 Hrs. A linear distance of 21 miles between the two shores was swum in about 12 Hrs and 17 minutes.

It was jubilation all over in the boat and all those present on the boat including the CSA observer Keith and the Skipper Andy King were overjoyed when the Dinghy brought back Mitali and Shruti into the boat. The Indian Flag was put on the boat for photographs of success.

We owe a special thanks to The CSA and especially to Mr. Keith Jefferies for helping us to organize this attempt and to our pilot Mr. Andy King for agreeing to escort our relay team for the Channel Crossing, a decision that was taken at short notice.

We do not know about future swims or how we will be going about them. What we do know is that the entire team including Keith and Andy became a cohesive group, something we had never expected and we look forward to meeting up again.