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South Africa Launches its own “English Channel Swim”

False Bay Swimming Association

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A group of seasoned open water swimmers from Cape Town have embarked on a mission to position the swim across False Bay as one of the most challenging and desirable swims in the world of marathon swimming. The False Bay Swim is a 34km open water swim, which compares to the English Channel and other Ocean Seven Swims around the world in terms of distance and conditions.

In line with marathon swimming internationally, The False Bay swim has its own rules and regulations with a strong focus on safety, to ensure the integrity of the crossing. The newly launched False Bay Swimming Association (FBSA) will be responsible for the coordination, officiating and promotion of the swim. All information is available on the new website - www.falsebayswim.co.za

The vision of the association is to bring the marathon swimming world to Cape Town. “We believe the swim has all the required ingredients to be an epic international challenge” said board member Ram Barkai. The FBSA is a non-profit association which will only focus on swims across the bay. This requires a focused effort to promote the swim locally and internationally as well as to regulate and record swims.

To date only five swimmers have successfully swum solo across False Bay - three South Africans and two international swimmers. The first successful swim was completed by Belgium swimmer Annemie Landmeters in 1989, while the most recent crossing took place in 2012 by Irish swimmer Ned Denison. The average swim time is approximately 11 hours and the longest so far is 14 hours. The fastest Male crossing was done by Barend Nortje from South Africa in time of 9:17h and the fastest Female crossing was done by Annemie Landmeters from Belgium in time of 9:56h. There have been more than 2 dozen other crossing attempts by different swimmers over the years which have been unsuccessful due to varying reasons, most of which retailing to the extreme challenges posed by the crossing.

The first relay team, six South African swimmers, swam across False Bay in 10 hours and 2 minutes in April this year, which ignited the desire to establish the swim and promote it internationally.

The Association allows for various categories. There is the elite skins category where swimmers wear one swimming cap, goggles and a standard swimming costume, and the wetsuit category where swimmers may wear an Ironman neoprene wetsuit. It also introduces solo category where a single person swims non-stop and relay category where a team of maximum six swimmers alternate every hour. The solo skins are regarded as the elite category as the swimmer has no protection against the cold water and has to complete the swim unassisted from one side of the bay to the other. The Association will accredit certified pilots and observes to ensure safety of swimmers and uphold the integrity of the swim.

The swim has two swim route options: 1. Rooi Els on the South East side of the bay to Millers Point, and 2. Pringle Bay to Bufflels Bay. Both routes are approximately 34km or 21.1 miles. The crossing season can be any time during the year; however, swim windows are affected by weather conditions, most notably the persistent South Easter. The best windows are spring and autumn, when the prevailing wind is less frequent. Water temperature can vary from 11C to 20C, while unpredictable tides and currents can also pose a challenge to swimmers. Sharks are always a factor in the Cape waters, however, shark sightings have dropped significantly in recent years. The swim routes are located in deeper waters where sharks are less frequently sighted and the swimmers are required to have shark shields on the boats.

The newly established board consists of a team of experienced long distance and cold water swimmers, namely Ram Barkai, Sam Whelpton, Carina Bruwer, Kieron Palframan, Eddie Cassar, and Derrick Frazer. A list of accredited Pilots and Observers can be found on the website. For a swim application form visit: <https://falsebayswim.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Swim-application.pdf>

The crossing will be marketed to the international marathon swimming fraternity, as well as locally across South Africa. The Association is excited about the potential of the initiative in bringing world famous swimmers from across the world to attempt our “own local English Channel”. “Many experienced swimmers out there are looking for new exciting swimming challenges - this swim will be very attractive” said Sam Whelpton, who sits on the new board and initiated the recent relay swim across the bay. “I am so excited about this initiative, the False Bay swim has all the elements that make for an epic open water challenge, and it’s about time the swim becomes a global marathon swimming bucket list item” said Carina Bruwer who is also on the board and is one of the five solo swimmers who swam across the bay in 2006 in a time of 10 hours and 58 minutes wearing only a speedo, cap and goggles.

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