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Swimmer crosses Cook Strait despite rough seas

Sunday, 25 February 2018, 12:56 pm

Press Release: **Abhejali Bernadova**

Swimmer crosses Cook Strait despite rough seas in the wake of Cyclone Gita

Feb 24

Despite stormy seas and strong currents potentially ruining any chance of a crossing, Abhejali Bernadova today swum the Cook Strait and become the seventh person in the world to complete the seven oceans challenge. She completed the swim in 13 hours, 9 minutes and 48 seconds, arriving at the tip of the South Island around 9.20pm. The swim was longer than expected due to the rough conditions and strong currents. For several hours during the swim Abhejali was fighting merely to hold her position and not be pulled back towards Wellington, but when currents settled she was able to continue covering ground. The swim was executed North to South, which is against the usual direction, as high winds were expected near Wellington this afternoon.

The timing to complete these crossings is extremely tight, as the swimmers can only attempt during either the full moon or on the half moon. At these times the currents and tides are at their calmest. With cyclone Gita hitting New Zealand three days ago, Abhejali had to cancel the planned swim on Thursday due to rough seas. Even today the seas were rough; Abhejali battled high swells, seasickness and being stung by a jellyfish that got stuck in her swimsuit. If Abhejali had not been able to complete the crossing, her next opportunity would not have been for two more weeks, and this would have entailed additional difficulties for her.

While 348 have completed the seven summits challenge – the scaling of the world’s seven highest mountains, To date only ten have completed the seven ocean’s challenge. This week, Abhejali is now the 10th person, 4th woman and first person actually living and training in a landlocked country (Ion Lazarenco Tiron is Irish AND MOLDAVIAN but lives and trains in Ireland) . The first woman to complete the challenge was Anna Carin Nordin from Sweden (not Kimberly Chambers - Kimberly Chambers was the 3rd woman to complete the Oceans Seven, and the first and only one so far from New Zealand).

Abhejali has completed the previous six necessary crossings over the past ten years. These are: North Channel (Scotland), the Molokai Channel (Hawaii), the English Channel, the Catalina Channel (USA), the Tsugaru Strait (Japan) and the Strait of Gibraltar (Spain). Whereas over 1,600 people have swum the English Channel, only 97 have crossed the Cook Strait. According to the rules of the Open Water Swimming society, these must be swum with no wetsuit. Abhejali has completed each of these swims on her first attempt. Considering the difficulty of each of these individual swims, her achievement is remarkable and gives testimony to her dedication, determination and talent for the sport. Her most difficult swim was the Molokai Channel, which took her nearly 22 hours in strong currents, as seasickness prevented her from being able to eat or drink and regain energy.

Abhejali was crewed on her swim by Harita Davies, who in 2017 became New Zealand’s first woman to complete the world’s longest race – the Self Transcendence 3,100 mile race in New York. These two women share a practice of meditation they learnt from their teacher Sri Chinmoy – also a pioneer in the world of sports who inspired many people to believe in their unlimited potential and reach unprecedented goals. Also crewing for her were Helena Royden, a Czech speaking New Zealander, Stacey Marsh, P. Thorpe and Vera Sevestiyanova.