

# THE WEEK

Adrian Sarchet's  
incredible  
journeys  
...and the  
film of his  
toughest

Pages 2, 3 & 7

A photograph of a man with a beard and a bald head, smiling and sitting on a stone wall. He is wearing a dark blue t-shirt with a logo and light-colored shorts. He is barefoot and has a watch on his left wrist. The background shows a rocky coastline and the sea.

Meet the  
Sea Donkey

SEVEN-DAY RADIO AND TV GUIDE INSIDE

‘I lifted my eyes above the horizon & decided to do more than just exist’



Training.

(Picture by James Harrison)



In 2011, after swimming around Guernsey. (Picture by Thomas Tardif, 19623218)



Coated in grease to insulate him from the cold water. (Picture by James Harrison)

On a beach in Herm, Adrian Sarchet made a decision that transformed him from an overweight, overworking advocate into a long-distance, open-sea swimmer. Today he is just one incredibly hard swim away from completing the Oceans Seven – the maritime equivalent of tackling seven of the world’s toughest mountain summits one after the other. He told **Martyn Tolcher** about the light bulb moment that changed his life – and how it’s all about teamwork

Adrian Sarchet in 2015 as he prepared to swim the North Channel between Scotland and Ireland. (Picture by Thomas Tardif, 19623205)



‘The swimmer is a tiny cog in a very big machine... You don’t get there unless you have the most amazing crew around you and the support of your entire family’

**B**Y THE time he had reached his mid-thirties, Guernsey advocate Adrian Sarchet was, in his own words, a heart attack waiting to happen. ‘I was working 12 or 13 hours a day, no exercise, eating far too much, I had a huge belly on me and after one flight of stairs I was nearly dead.’ Today, at the age of 42, there is a much leaner look to Adrian’s ample physique and a simple flight of stairs is the least of his daily exertions. This is because he has reinvented himself as a long distance open sea swimmer – on a mission to complete one of the world’s most demanding endurance challenges, both physically and psychologically. Now he is just one incredibly hard swim away from completing the Oceans Seven, which is the maritime equivalent of tackling seven of the world’s toughest mountain summits one after the other. To date he has swum the English Channel, the Strait of Gibraltar and the stretch of water between Ireland and Scotland known as the North Channel. He has also made it across the shark-infested Molokai Channel in Hawaii, the Catalina Channel off Los Angeles and, earlier this year, the Tsugaru Channel in Japan. Adrian’s amazing list of achievements, which also includes open water swims around Guernsey and Jersey, has not happened without an exceptional amount of pain, effort and willpower on his part. Along the way he has encountered exhaustion, hypothermia, seasickness, splitting headaches, rough seas, jellyfish stings and even a severe electric shock from a device meant to protect

him from sharks. He has come through it all and now there is just one huge challenge left – the Cook Strait between the North and South islands of New Zealand that he and his trusted team are planning to do next year. If he manages to finish that swim, over 16 nautical miles of water in rough conditions, he will be among a group of fewer than 10 in the world to have completed the entire Oceans Seven challenge. Adrian instantly accepts that there are many far easier ways of getting fit and warding off coronary heart disease, but fitness is not really one of his primary motivations. He does it to feel alive. He is also at pains to get across that his ocean swims are not merely a solo effort. Supported every inch of the way by his wife Andrea and a small band of close friends and family members, he is adamant that it is something he could not possibly do without a team behind him. ‘The swimmer is a tiny cog in a very big machine and if you don’t have the other elements of the machine you will fail,’ he stressed. ‘You don’t get there unless you have the most amazing crew around you and the support of your entire family.’

**S**wimming for hours on end in choppy waters was the last thing on Adrian’s mind when he unwittingly agreed to the far less daunting challenge that got him going. It was Christmas Day 2009 and Adrian was enjoying an enormous festive family meal with all the trimmings. His brother Ian asked if he would like some more roast beef and more roast potatoes. ‘Then he said, “Would you like to swim around Herm for Help for Heroes?” and I said: “Yes please”.’ True to his word, Adrian began training in January 2010 and soon began to lose weight and feel a little fitter. Then he suffered his first major

Below: Crossing the Molokai Channel. (Picture by Jeff Kozlovich)



Above: Adrian (right) at Cires Point in Morocco after swimming the Strait of Gibraltar. With him are (from left) Ingrid Basso (Italy), Loic Tordo (France) and Henry Sanz (France). The group completed the swim together.

setback, when he severed his Achilles tendon playing football, but even being hampered by a large cast shaped like a diving boot did not put him off. He continued to train in the water and was still wearing the cast on the day of the Herm swim, which he somehow managed to complete. ‘Stomping up the beach in Herm I got a flash for the first time: if I can do that, what else can I do?’ That afternoon started it. It was the first time I’d lifted my eyes above the horizon and done more than just exist.’ The following year, 2011, Adrian turned his focus to swimming around Guernsey. He and Andrea hit on the idea of using chocolate mini-rolls as source of nutrition because they floated in their watertight packs. They also invested in an energy drink in powder form but they inadvertently chose the wrong product and Adrian had to abort the swim due to the drink’s unwelcome effects on his bladder. A few weeks later, better informed and better prepared, he completed his swim around the island at the second attempt, in about 11 hours.

**A**t roughly the same time the veteran Channel swimmer Roger Allsopp was looking for someone to support him on his six-hour qualification swim in Dover Harbour. Adrian readily volunteered and ended up qualifying himself to swim the English Channel, which he went on to do in August 2012 in a respectable time of 14 hours and two minutes. But the initial feeling of elation did not last long and when he got back home he was overcome with a feeling of emptiness. ‘We thought that was it. We didn’t have another mission to work towards and I was really low.’ The following month Andrea bought Adrian a copy of H2Open

Right: Recovering in a Belfast hospital after completing the North Channel Swim, with Barbara Kennedy, who was one of the team looking after him.



(Picture by James Harrison)



Above (from left): Filmmaker James Harrison, Adam Le Gallez, animation expert, drone operator Mark Guille, Adrian Sarchet and Adrian’s wife Andrea Sarchet-Luff. (Picture by Adrian Miller, 19560106)

stop the migraine. They then got him to drink water with dissolved seasickness tablets to control the vomiting and at his next feeding point they gave him a high-carb feed mixed with painkillers. Very slowly Adrian began to recover, and he completed the swim. Hawaii was his most critical tipping point but he did not have it easy this year when he flew to Japan to tackle swim number six on his Oceans Seven list. It was a case of the donkey versus the dragon because the Tsugaru Channel is infamous among ocean swimmers for its fierce current, known by the Japanese as the dragon. ‘This swim is not designed for big swimmers and it’s horrifically tough,’ he said. ‘I had to go flat-out against the dragon and for seven hours the donkey just kept on swimming.’

**E**very leg of the Oceans Seven, especially in far away places like Japan, involves a huge logistical challenge, and again he stressed that he could not have done it without the support of all those behind him. In particular he praised his wife Andrea, his friends Mandy and Pete and the members of the Guernsey Swimming Club who have helped him in his training and all-round preparation over the years. ‘Working to complete mission impossible every year makes you realise that nothing is beyond you but the real joy is having an extended family of like-minded lunatics to support you in those endeavours, whether it is crewing for you, training with you in the pool or simply having a pint and a chat after a Sunday morning sea swim.’

◆ **Filming the Northern Channel swim – page 7**

The Challenge

- THE swimmer can only wear a normal swimsuit (no neoprene), a standard swim cap and a standard pair of goggles; the swimmer stays in the water at all times; the swimmer cannot touch the boat or any crew members; the swimmer is fed via a bottle on a string which remains slack at all times; and the swimmer receives no assistance in any way from the boat or the crew, other than feeding and moral support.
- Adrian says: ‘For a sport that only requires a swimming costume, a cap and a pair of goggles, the kit is ridiculous! A full first aid kit, a cardiac defibrillator, a satellite tracker, a shark deterrent system, Vaseline for the bits that rub, lights for night swimming, sun screen, feed and feeding bottles and lines, painkillers and anti-inflammatories, hot water bottles, towels, a palette knife and some Swarfega.’

against her body, which is usually the precursor to an attack. Adrian and his team studied the film footage and decided to mitigate the risk by employing a kayaker to tow a shark shield – basically two metres of thick electric cable designed to confuse the predator’s attacking senses. The attempt got under way calmly in the pitch black of night but it all went wrong when the shark shield was thrown by a freak wave, which resulted in the shark shield hitting Adrian in the teeth and electrocuting him. ‘It was horrible. One of the most painful things I’ve ever experienced. A migraine exploded across my skull and I started to feel sick. A couple of hours later as the sun came up I began vomiting uncontrollably. I knew had about another 12 hours of swimming to

go. I told the crew, I’m finished, I’m getting out.’

**A**t that point the two most trusted members of his support team, Mandy Mackelworth and Pete Rowland, knew that it was down to them to keep him in the water. ‘They transformed into good cop and bad cop. Mandy informed me in terms you could never publish that I wasn’t getting out and Pete was good cop, telling me all I had to do was to swim to the next feed.’ As a quick fix it worked, but the crew knew they had to do more to keep him going. They took his cap off because they saw he was overheating and changed his clear night goggles for polarised ones to



Stomping up the beach in Herm I got a flash for the first time: if I can do that, what else can I do?

(Picture by James Harrison)



Adrian Sarchet's Oceans Seven swim across the Northern Channel was made in the summer of 2015 and filmmaker James Harrison was there every inch of the way to record what happened. The result, the documentary film Sea Donkey, will be premiered at Beau Sejour next month, as **Martyn Tolcher** reports

# 'It's as much about the journey as the swim...'



Filmmaker James Harrison, who has made a documentary about Adrian Sarchet's 19-mile swim between Northern Ireland and Scotland. (Picture by Adrian Miller, 19568561)

## The making of Sea Donkey

**L**OCAL filmmaker James Harrison will realise a career-long ambition as a cameraman with the public screening of his first feature length documentary. His film, Sea Donkey, will be shown at Beau Sejour next month and follows the attempt by fellow Guernseyman Adrian Sarchet to swim a 19-mile stretch of open water from Ireland to Scotland. The Northern Channel is one of the hardest legs of the Oceans Seven challenge, which comprises seven of the world's toughest open water long distance swims. Adrian's successful swim was made in the summer of 2015 and James was there every inch of the way to record it. He also spent many hours filming the Sea Donkey during Adrian's months of preparation and training. 'I'd really wanted to do a feature-length documentary for quite a few years but it was trying to find the right story and the right person,' James said. 'Adrian is an ordinary guy with a hell of a lot of willpower and that's what I wanted to get across.' While his documentary will appeal to swimmers and sports-minded people in general, James was at pains to produce a film that would capture the imagination of a much wider audience. 'I've always, from the start, tried to make a film which would appeal to more than just swimmers or endurance athletes, and from the feedback we've had it seems to have worked,' he said. 'Friends with no interest in sport and no interest in endurance activities, including one or two who were dreading watching it for 96 minutes, ended up being engrossed. That was my aim.' The end result is a documentary that explores the tenacity of the human spirit through one man's determination to achieve his goal – no matter the circumstances that are thrown against him.

'The film is as much about the journey to the swim as the swim itself and that's what hopefully comes across,' James said. The two men met after James was taken on in 2012 to help with the filming of the ITV reality series Island Hospital at the PEH. Adrian had been admitted with a shoulder injury and James got to know him during this work. It helped that James was (and still is) a keen open-water swimmer himself. 'It all randomly fell into place. I'd got to know Adrian and it was actually when he did his round Jersey swim in 2014 that I sent him a text to say congratulations, and I think we should make a film.' Adrian's response, of course, was positive, and they agreed that the Northern Channel swim would provide the perfect focus for such a documentary.

James began by interviewing Adrian on camera for his back-story and then spent many months filming him while he trained in the pool at St Sampson's High School and at various locations around Guernsey. 'Because we were training together in the pool I would take a GoPro along and film bits while I was there. Some of it was planned and some of it wasn't planned. 'I tried to make it not feel like a local film. That means you have to get all the technical elements right. The camera work is one thing but the biggest thing people fall down on is poor audio, especially when you're filming on the sea in the wind. 'I wanted it to sound good, I wanted it to look good, I wanted the music to work with it, but if the narrative is wrong then all of that falls apart. The story had to be strong and everything else comes around it.' James was also determined to make it as much a Guernsey production as

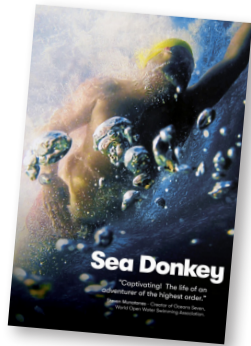
possible, yet without compromising on the quality and the professionalism of the filmmaking. He called on former Guernsey resident Nik Laker to create the score from scratch and friend Alex Digard to do the artwork and the website, while Adam Le Gallez did the animations and Mark Guille provided the drone footage. 'I wanted to make the best film I could and not have to worry about money, so it's lucky we had people come on board that have been paid a lot less than they should be. We also had a grant from the Guernsey Arts Commission that made it possible.'

**N**ow aged 35, James cut his teeth when he was a young BMX bike enthusiast, making amateur films with his father's video camera. 'A lot of people who do those extreme sports tend to want to document it. It just felt a natural thing.' When he left school James did 'lots of different jobs that I never really liked' and at the age of 23, after finding out that he qualified for a States grant, he went to Portsmouth University to do a TV and film degree as a mature student. He was there for four years including a foundation year and the film he chose to make at the end of his course, which was a short documentary about Deputy John Gollop, helped to gain him a first. He now does corporate work, including filming for VisitGuernsey, and one of his aims with Sea Donkey was to make it 'a showcase for our beautiful island home'. ♦ The documentary has its public premiere at Beau Sejour on Wednesday 8 November, with 10 per cent of the net profit from ticket sales going to Guernsey Disability Swimming. The film will be streamed online on Vimeo on Demand the following day. Orders can be made through the website [seadonkeyfilm.com](http://seadonkeyfilm.com) and there is Facebook page [facebook/seadonkeyfilm](https://www.facebook.com/seadonkeyfilm)

## See for yourself...

**S**EA DONKEY premieres Sat Beau Sejour on 8 November at 7.30pm. Tickets are available from: ♦ [guernseytickets.gg](http://guernseytickets.gg) (click on 8 November on calendar, top right of screen) ♦ Beau Sejour reception ♦ Box office: 747200

The film will be released for streaming/download on Vimeo on Demand, on Thursday 9 November. The film can be pre-ordered from [seadonkeyfilm.com](http://seadonkeyfilm.com) by pressing the 'watch film' tab on the home page. A limited release on DVD & Blu-ray will be sold on the night at Beau Sejour. DVD: £10. Blu-ray: £15. When purchased (on all formats) Sea Donkey will also come with 25 minutes of extra interview footage, not used in the film.



documentary