

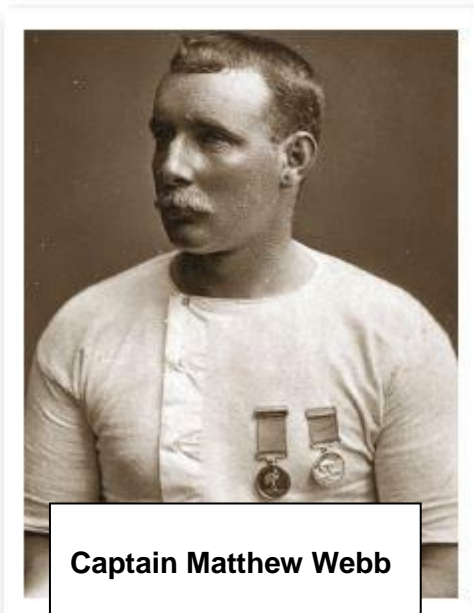
Swimming the English Channel

from Dover in England to Calais in France

The first Channel swimmer

On a foggy August afternoon in 1875, a lone swimmer dived from Admiralty Pier in Dover into the cold waters of the English Channel. Nearly twenty-two hours later, the exhausted man staggered onto French soil at Calais and became an instant hero. Captain Matthew Webb had become the first person to swim across the English Channel.

Twenty-seven-year-old Webb was a merchant seaman from Shropshire. He had always been a powerful swimmer and, hearing of J.B. Thompson's failed attempt to swim the Channel in 1872, he was inspired to give up his job and train as a long-distance swimmer. Webb's first attempt had to be abandoned due to bad weather, but he returned to the icy Channel waters two weeks later.



Many of the

hardships that Matthew Webb had to deal with during his pioneering swim are still faced by modern-day Channel swimmers. In fact, some of his methods for dealing with these hardships are still used today. Webb coated himself in oil for protection against the cold and jellyfish stings. He was also accompanied by boats so his friends could protect and feed him. It must be said, however, that the ale, brandy and beef tea they supplied are not standard for today's cross-Channel swimmers!

Frequently asked questions

Q: How cold is the water?

A: The water temperature can range from 12°C to 18°C. Most people would consider water below 20°C too cold for swimming.

Q: How far is it from England to France?

A: The direct distance from Dover to Cape Gris Nez near Calais is approximately 21 miles, but a swimmer always swims further than that due to the movement of tides.

Q: How long does it take to swim across the Channel?

A: How fast do you swim? The faster you are, the more direct your swim will be. A slower swimmer will not only take longer but will have to swim further because of the tides and currents. Swimmers also have to plan stops for feeding. The fastest recorded crossing is 7 hours; the slowest is nearly 29 hours. An average swimmer doing two miles per hour would be in the water for up to 16 hours, but a stronger swimmer may take only 10 hours.

Q: Will you succeed if you train hard?

A: Preparation for a Channel swim involves months of training in very cold ocean water. But even this does not guarantee success. Fewer people have swum the English Channel than have climbed Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain! Some hazards of the swim include hypothermia (dangerous loss of body heat), seasickness and jellyfish. Unforeseen obstacles like rubbish floating in the sea can also cause problems no matter how hard you train.

Q: Why do people swim the English Channel?

A: That isn't a question with a single answer! The motivations for such a venture are as varied as the swimmers. Some people do it for glory, some to raise money for charity, but most do it to challenge themselves and for the satisfaction of being one of a select few to achieve this feat.

Safe to swim?

The French and UK coastguards are responsible for search and rescue operations in the English Channel. The French authorities outlawed swimming from France to England in 1993 for safety reasons. Then in 2010 the deputy director of the French coastguard, Jean-Christophe Burvingt, said he was in favour of a complete ban on swimming in either direction. He pointed out that the swim uses the same stretch of water as 500 vessels each day. Critics compare the swim to crossing a motorway on foot; supporters say the swim is well regulated and comparatively safe.

Celebrity swimmer

The author, comedian and actor, David Walliams, says that he was never sporty at school but he did enjoy swimming. While preparing for his Channel swim, Walliams didn't miss a single training session in nine months. He knew that more than 90 per cent of people who attempt the swim fail. Walliams took 10 hours and 34 minutes to cross the Channel. His swim raised more than £1 million in donations for the charity Sport Relief.



1. *Nearly twenty-two hours later, the exhausted man staggered onto French soil at Calais and became an instant hero.*

Find and **copy two** different words from the sentence above that show how tired Matthew Webb was.

1. _____

2. _____

1 mark

2. What event made Matthew Webb want to swim the English Channel?

1 mark

3. Using information from the text, put a tick in the correct box to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

	True	False
Matthew Webb's first attempt to swim the English Channel was not successful.		
The first successful swim of the English Channel was in 1872.		
J.B. Thompson and Matthew Webb swam the English Channel in 1875.		
Matthew Webb took twenty hours to swim the English Channel.		

2 marks

4. Name **two** of the hardships that Matthew Webb faced in swimming the English Channel and explain how he dealt with them.

1. Hardship: _____

How he dealt with it: _____

2. Hardship: _____

How he dealt with it: _____

2 marks

5. Why do slow Channel swimmers swim further than faster swimmers?

1 mark

6. Look at the section headed: **Frequently asked questions.**

How long did the fastest swim across the Channel take?

1 mark

7. Look at the section headed: **Frequently asked questions.**

Put a tick in the correct box to show whether each of the following statements is a **fact** or an **opinion**.

	Fact	Opinion
The temperature of the water in the Channel can range from 12°C to 18°C.		
Water with a temperature of 18°C is too cold to swim in.		
The direct distance across the Channel is approximately 21 miles.		
Faster swimmers do not swim as many miles across the Channel.		

2 marks

8. David Walliams was determined to be successful in his attempt to swim the English Channel.

Give **one** piece of evidence from the text which shows this.

1 mark

9. Which of the following would be the most suitable summary of the whole text?

Tick **one**.

The Life of David Walliams

A Sporting Challenge

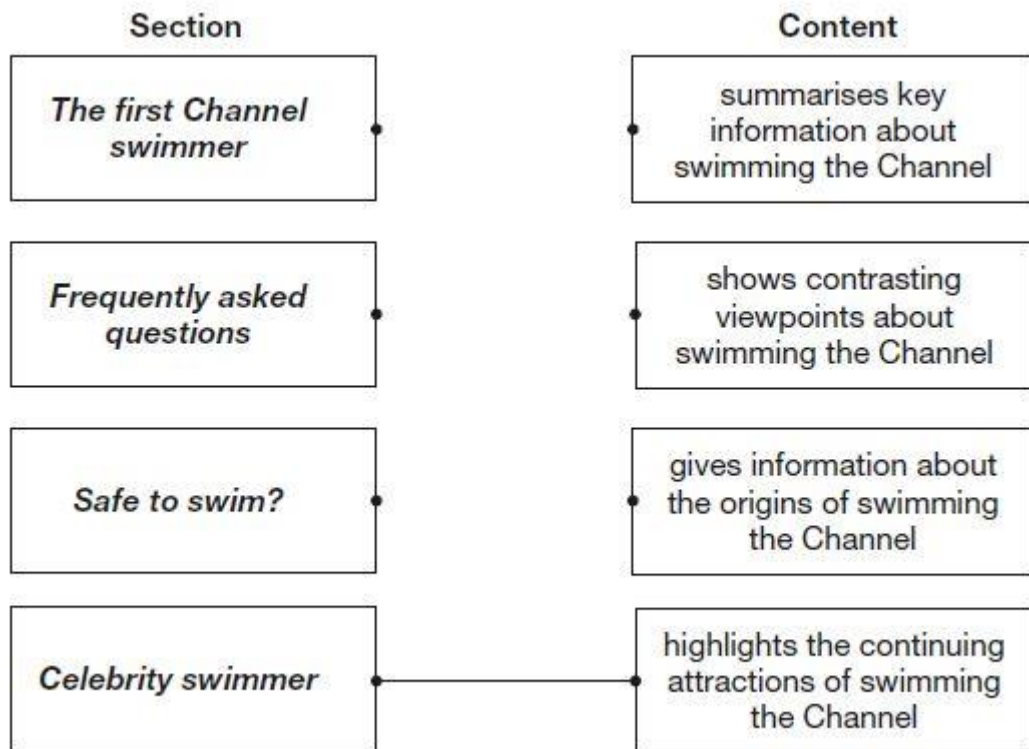
Sailing the Channel

Training for Survival

1 mark

10. Draw lines to match each section to its main content.

One has been done for you.



1 mark