

The woman who finished the world's hardest swim

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

Rank these sporting feats in order from 1 (the hardest) to 6 (the easiest). Give reasons for your choice.

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 1. _____ | a. swimming the length of the Amazon River from its source to the sea |
| 2. _____ | b. climbing Mount Everest |
| 3. _____ | c. walking to the North Pole |
| 4. _____ | d. rowing from Iceland to Norway |
| 5. _____ | e. sailing around the world single-handed |
| 6. _____ | f. cycling from Cairo to Cape Town |

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers will help you.

thigh

marathon

nuts

solo

coach

- A _____ is someone who teaches a sports player or athlete. (para 1)
- A _____ trip is one that you take alone. (para 2)
- _____ is an informal word for *crazy*. (para 3)
- A _____ swimmer completes long swims of at least 10km. (para 4)
- Your _____ is the top part of your leg, above the knee. (para 5)

amputation

psychological

strait

goggles

shin

- Your _____ is the lower part of your leg, below the knee. (para 5)
- An _____ is the removal an arm, leg, finger or toe. (para 5)
- A _____ is a narrow area of water that joins two larger areas of water. (para 7)
- _____ are special glasses that you wear to protect your eyes when swimming. (para 9)
- If something is _____, it involves your mind. (para 10)

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

- Where are the Farallon Islands?
- How long did it take Kim Chambers to swim from the islands to San Francisco?
- How old is she?
- How deep are the waters around the Farallon Islands?
- How many climbers have reached the top of Mount Everest?
- How many swimmers have completed the Farallon Islands swim?

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'I prepared not to come back': the woman who finished the world's hardest swim

Charlotte Simmonds

20 October, 2017

- 1 In August, 2015, Kim Chambers got onto a boat and sailed out to sea under the Golden Gate Bridge. She took a support team that included her mother, a film crew and her swimming coach. They were going to the Farallon Islands, about 30 miles off the coast of San Francisco.
- 2 Chambers was trying something no woman had ever done: a solo swim from the islands back under the Golden Gate Bridge. The swim is the hardest in the world because of the icy water, strong winds, heavy seas and great white sharks.
- 3 The boat arrived at the islands at 11pm. Ten minutes later, Chambers jumped. "It sounds completely nuts," she says, "but when I went to the Farallones, I prepared not to come back. I did my washing because I wanted my home to be tidy when they came to collect my stuff."
- 4 But she came back, 17 hours and 12 minutes later. Now, a documentary film tells the story of how a 38-year-old who had only been swimming seriously for four years became one of the world's top marathon swimmers.
- 5 She said it started with an accident. "It was just a normal day," she said. "I was wearing heels that were too high. I slipped down the stairs on my way to work and I hit my leg." At the hospital, they took skin from her thigh to cover the wounds on her shin. "The doctors said I was 30 minutes from amputation and had a 1% chance of ever walking again," she said.
- 6 Chambers spent two years in therapy and started swimming to find "a sense of freedom". Soon, she met members of the Dolphin Club, a group of marathon swimmers. "It was like a secret society of adventurers," she remembers. "I was just alive."
- 7 Her swimming coach says she was a terrible swimmer in the beginning. But she didn't give up. She began with a swim to the famous Alcatraz prison. As the years passed, she became the third woman, and only the sixth person, to complete the Oceans Seven – a series of dangerous straits and channels around the world.
- 8 But she was still fascinated by the Farallones. She described her first swims at the islands as like being "in a wonderland, like another world". It's easy to understand the Farallones' strange attraction. From San Francisco, it looks like a ghost, appearing and disappearing with the fog. The waters around the islands are more than 3,000 metres deep in places. In that huge space, a swimmer seems naked and out of place.
- 9 The marathon swimmers' rulebook said she must wear only a swimming costume and goggles and could not touch her support boat. She paused every 30 minutes to drink a liquid "feed" that her team threw into the water.
- 10 What do you think about while swimming for 17 hours? Chambers says there are periods she can't remember. "You feel like you're in a dream. I tell people it's like being in space." But she says that she calmed her nerves by thinking of those she loved on the boat beside her. "People say these swims are 80% psychological and 20% physical."
- 11 She admits it's a lonely sport. More than 4,000 climbers have climbed to the top of Everest; Chambers was just the fifth person to complete the Farallones swim. She says her swims are not athletic events. "They are personal journeys. When I get out of the water, I'm a different person from the one who jumped in." "Crazy" is a word she hears a lot. "I don't see myself as crazy," she says. "I'm just Kim and I like to swim."

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4 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Kim Chambers started swimming ... | a. ... because the water is cold and there are sharks. |
| 2. Her coach said she ... | b. ... marathon swimming is 80% psychological and 20% physical. |
| 3. The Farallon Islands swim is the hardest in the world ... | c. ... after she had an accident. |
| 4. After her accident, doctors said ... | d. ... by thinking of her friends and relatives on the support boat. |
| 5. During the swim, she calmed her nerves ... | e. ... she would probably never walk again. |
| 6. Kim Chambers believes that ... | f. ... was a terrible swimmer when she first started swimming. |

5 Chunks

Rearrange the words to make phrases from the text.

- the in the hardest world
- no done woman ever had something
- swimmers one marathon world's of top the
- than deep more three metres thousand
- to my work way on
- miles about coast off thirty the

6 Two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| 1. documentary | a. seas |
| 2. strong | b. costume |
| 3. icy | c. film |
| 4. heavy | d. world |
| 5. swimming | e. winds |
| 6. another | f. waters |

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7 Prepositions

Complete the sentences using these prepositions. Check your answers in the text.

on

in

of

by

at

down

1. She slipped _____ the stairs.
2. The boat arrived _____ the islands at 11pm.
3. She wanted to find a sense _____ freedom.
4. She was a terrible swimmer _____ the beginning.
5. People she loved were _____ the boat beside her.
6. She calmed her nerves _____ thinking of her friends and family.

8 Discussion

- Do you think Kim Chambers is 'crazy'? Why? Why not?
- Would you like to try a swim like this one? Why? Why not?

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KEY

2 Key words

1. coach
2. solo
3. nuts
4. marathon
5. thigh
6. shin
7. amputation
8. strait
9. goggles
10. psychological

3 Find the information

1. about 30 miles off the coast of San Francisco
2. 17 hours and 12 minutes
3. 38
4. more than 3,000 metres in places
5. more than 4,000
6. five

4 Comprehension check

1. c
2. f
3. a
4. e
5. d
6. b

5 Chunks

1. the hardest in the world
2. something no woman had ever done
3. one of the world's top marathon swimmers
4. more than three thousand metres deep
5. on my way to work
6. about thirty miles off the coast

6 Two-word phrases

1. c
2. e
3. f
4. a
5. b
6. d

7 Prepositions

1. down
2. at
3. of
4. in
5. on
6. by