

Otter Swimming Club Annual Report

Otter Swimming Club officers 2006

President	Roger Sharpley
Hon. Secretary	Hugh Turner
Hon. Treasurer	Martin Flash
Vice Presidents	
Lesley Davies	Anthony Ray
Alex Starling	James Stewart
Captain of Swimming (men)	Scott Darling
Captain of Swimming (women)	Fiona Marshall
Captain of Water Polo (men)	Eric Boldon
Captain of Water Polo (women)	Susan Pearce
Water Polo Hon. Secretary	Ben Tausig
Hon. Handicapper	Gina Hobson
Committee Members	
Aileen Brown	Alex Freelove
Rachel Joyce	Lydia Kan
James Kerton	Grant Monk
Katherine Mearman	Greg Moore
James Palmer	
Swimming Coaches	
Peter Carpenter	Nicole Dyson
Ross Croasdell	Ruth Morrison
Adam McCarthy	Steve Bratt
Water Polo Coaches	
Tim Kendall	Nick Buller

Club Finance & Administration

Last year the Club slipped badly into the red. This year it almost but not quite got out of it, and we managed to do it while preserving the full structure of sessions and coaching. We have moved subscriptions again as a consequence of this year's loss, and also because coaching and pool costs (which constitute 80% of our costs) are always on the move. We have taken the opportunity to recover the situation the Club traditionally had until 2000 of a single subscription for all Active members. The Club is still tremendous value for a committed or regular swimmer or polo player.

Income statement

The income statement has few surprises. Subscription income rose, but regrettably not by enough. Income from subscriptions was generously supplemented this year by the donors to the Prizes & General Fund, to whom we owe many thanks.

Prizes & General Fund

David Bancroft, Alistair Booth, Catherine Cassidy, Mark Courtney, Scott Darling, Helen Davies, Mike Downs, Charles Doxat, David Earl, Phil Edmonds, Ted Evans, Bruno Fabre, Tim Fraser, Wilton Fry, Micky Gallagher, Peter Grace, David Haig, Vic Hardy, Paul Hindle, John Iliffe, David Juxon, Izzy Kenning, Conrad King, Denis Lean, Alison Lievesley, Roger Lloyd-Mostyn, Valeria Mizuno, Alex Monk, Andrew Morton, Charlie Murray, Bill Myers, Derek Parr, Doug Payne, Debbie Paynter, Desmond Plummer Kt.TD.DL., Guy Powdrill, Alex Ray,

Jim Ricketts, Nigel Salsbury, Michelle Senecal, Roger Sharpley, Liz Shaw, Malcolm Sheehan, David Skidmore OBE, Matt Staines, James Stewart, Dennis Stewart, Bob Thomas, Paul Thorogood, Simon Threlfall, John Towers, Hugh Turner, Leon Walkden, Brian Walton, Dennis Warnford-Davis, Debbie Willet, Garry Willets, Catherine Wilson, Mike Woodman.

On the expenses side we spent more than we had intended on coaching and less than we had intended on pool hire, and the budget process may have been at fault. Compared to last year we spent less on pools and more on coaching, and the gross figure went down. In physical terms we did indeed cap pool hire by adapting our use of it to high and low demand periods. In swimming we started a head coach structure with Ross Croasdell, from whose efforts we benefited greatly, and this pattern will be continued with Steve Bratt who joined us at the end of the year. Equipment costs, which are both significant and recurring, were down slightly on the previous year but we will need to make more investments this coming year.

Our activity costs climbed this year, a reflection mostly of our very successful water polo teams, and also of slightly greater swimming team expenses. The cost of our affiliation to the ASA also climbs each year. The expenses related to Club activities were largely unchanged at a low level. We now follow a general policy for these events (dinner, open water, golf etc), or setting fixed prices in advance and swallowing some costs at club level. This is to encourage participation and make organising them easier. Lastly administration costs were largely flat and this should continue. Overall we made a slight loss, less than 5% of turnover.

Balance sheet

The biggest single change in the balance sheet this year is the rise in our investments thanks to the donation by James Stewart last year. The actual worth at the year-end of our investments is £54,000, compared to the at-cost figure in the balance sheet of £31,000. If one bears in mind that one third of this last figure was provided by James 12 months ago, we have a healthy capital gain on the rest.

The next notable figure is the drop in our working capital. Although this and last year's loss has something to do with the drop, the major reason is the regrettable newfound efficiency of the pools we use in billing us in advance. This is a one-off change, but we should build up our working capital a bit from the present level for the security of our operations. This we can only do by making a small annual surplus.

Our capital has been increased by the annual increase in our trophy self-insurance fund, and by donations. We owe our thanks to the following;

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Memorial Fund

Conrad King, Denis Lean, Mike Woodman.

Overall the Club has retained its financial worth. Hopefully we are near financial stability with our large existing structure and we can look forward to building again on this where we can.

The Hon.Auditor Tim Fraser as usual did his best to pick holes in the financial numbers and he cast a quizzical eye over the financial practices of the Treasurer. Members will be relieved to know he found no cause for complaint and we owe him our thanks for his efforts.

	<i>Income statement - £</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2005</i>
Subscriptions total	72,588	64,539	
Special sessions	0	0	
Prizes & general fund	1,953	1,944	
<u>Members income</u>	<u>74,540</u>	<u>66,483</u>	
External income	5,358	9,100	
Capital income	1,285	1,020	
Miscellaneous income	874	338	
<u>Other income</u>	<u>7,516</u>	<u>10,458</u>	
<u>Income</u>	<u>82,056</u>	<u>76,941</u>	
Pool hire costs	(40,161)	(47,245)	
Equipment costs	(1,469)	(3,747)	
<u>Pools & equipment</u>	<u>(41,630)</u>	<u>(50,992)</u>	
Coaching costs	(25,131)	(20,465)	
<u>Coaching</u>	<u>(25,131)</u>	<u>(20,465)</u>	
Water polo expenses	(3,782)	(3,382)	
Swimming expenses	(1,976)	(648)	
Affiliation costs	(4,420)	(3,236)	
Prizes and trophies	(1,108)	(1,572)	
<u>Activity costs</u>	<u>(11,286)</u>	<u>(8,836)</u>	
Dinner	135	317	
Open water races	(587)	(573)	
Shop sales	(40)	189	
<u>Club activities</u>	<u>(491)</u>	<u>(67)</u>	
Insurance	(1,200)	(1,400)	
Post and printing costs	(3,783)	(3,498)	
Tax	0	0	
Miscellaneous costs	(1,227)	(1,032)	
<u>Administration</u>	<u>(6,210)</u>	<u>(5,930)</u>	
<u>Expenses</u>	<u>(84,749)</u>	<u>(86,291)</u>	
<u>Profit / (Loss)</u>	<u>(2,693)</u>	<u>(9,350)</u>	

"I have examined the books and vouchers of Otter Swimming Club and have obtained all necessary explanations for me to certify that these accounts show a reasonable view of the Club's activities for the year and its financial position as at the 31st December 2006." Hon Auditor. Tim Fraser 5/2/2007

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<i>Balance sheet - £</i>	2006	2005
Trophies	35,000	35,000
<i>Fixed Assets</i>	35,000	35,000
Investments at cost	31,209	21,209
Self insurance investment	7,299	6,521
<i>Investments</i>	38,507	27,730
<u>Long term assets</u>	<u>73,507</u>	<u>62,730</u>
Bank	9,593	15,232
Debtors	4,055	3,695
Stock	4,225	4,327
<i>Current assets</i>	17,873	23,254
Creditors	(5,061)	(2,787)
Reserves or contingencies	(6,473)	(1,930)
<i>Current liabilities</i>	(11,534)	(4,717)
<u>Working capital</u>	<u>6,339</u>	<u>18,537</u>
<u>Assets</u>	<u>79,847</u>	<u>81,267</u>
Computer fund	1,930	1,680
Spoon fund	3,338	2,738
<i>Sinking funds</i>	5,268	4,418
<i>Provisions</i>	5,268	4,418
Life membership fund	10,739	10,539
Memorial fund	19,306	19,195
Trophy insurance fund	7,000	6,400
<i>Capital funds</i>	37,045	36,134
Balance b/fwd	40,715	14,648
Capital income & reserves	(488)	35,418
Result for year	(2,693)	(9,350)
<i>Reserve funds</i>	37,534	40,715
<u>Reserves</u>	<u>74,579</u>	<u>76,849</u>
<u>Reserves & provisions</u>	<u>79,847</u>	<u>81,267</u>

Investments #: Brunner Investment Trust 2517, Foreign & Colonial Investment Trust 7465, Fleming Claverhouse Share Plan 226, Flemming Claverhouse Investment Trust 1530, Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust 2854.

Administration

The combined membership and accounting database appears to be working satisfactorily and this should enable us to go the next step of putting our administration on the web. If this is successful, and there are many issues to resolve, then we can organise better how we keep members details, we can combine e-mail lists, and we can eliminate or reduce both mailings and printing costs. All this is in the future.

For both polo and swimming we would not be able to have achieved what we have without our dedicated band of coaches. We owe many thanks to Tim Kendall, Nick Buller, Lesley Davies, Ross Croasdell, Peter Carpenter, Ruth Morrison, Adam McCarthy and Nicole Dyson, plus several volunteer members, and at the end of the year Steve Bratt.

Our pool structure is unchanged but costs per hour vary by almost 20% between them, and in almost inverse proportion to pool quality and lane space. Changing this requires patience and application. We try to have one member responsible for each pool and we are constantly looking for new openings. As mentioned earlier the equipment is now a constant cost and needs regular attention. As in other activities of the Club, volunteer members do this (Alex Frelove for swimming equipment) and we owe them our thanks. All these volunteers could always use help.

Membership

At the end of the year the membership of the Club was made up of 353(341) members. There were 110(116) Active swimmers, 85(81) Active polo players, 24(19) Country members, 77(70) Non Active members, 20(18) Junior members and 37(37) Life members. There were 112(102) lady members, as before about one third of the polo players and slightly less than half the swimmers. The average age of Active members was unchanged at 32. Within the overall numbers are 77(71) new members (32 of them polo players) and we welcome the following to the Club.

New members

Adam Smith, Al Souza, Alfonso Tucay, Alix Hardy, Andy Bloxam, Anna Dunster, Ben McQueen, Bill Gebhardt, Bruno Fabre, Caroline Morton, Catherine Charman, Chris Adams, Chris Lanigan, Chrissie Wellington, Clare Newell, Daniel Cotton, David Haig, David Jeffrey, Dulcey Bower, Dylan Malagrino, Filippo Di Pisa, Fiona MacNeill, Flavio Rusconi, Frank Smardo, Graeme Gunthorp, Gregory Pienaar, Huw Riley, Imelda Moffat, Jacques Venter, James Stewart, Jean-Louis Benavides, Jorg Hampel, Joseph Braunreuther III, Juan Aldana, Kate Barrow, Kate Curl, Kathleen Pearce, Kenny Kutzler, Kevin Steele, Kimberly Kidd, Leon Estrella, Lewis Meredith, Louisa Price, Madleen Noreisch, Marcel Pereira, Matt Dempsey, Michaela Krejci, Michelle Senecal, Nicci Llewelyn, Nicole Dyson, Nicole Mahoney, Paula Croxson, Penny O'Connor, Phil Edmonds, Phil

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Harper, Rain Newton-Smith, Richard Thomson, Rob Padden, Rob Williams, Rodney Mccune, Sally Inwood, Sam Billett, Sandy Wilson, Sarah Holcombe, Sarah McDonald, Sarah Paterson, Sarah Skennerton, Sasha Maese, Shaun Hotchkiss, Spencer Corrigal, Stephen Greene, Stephen Harrison, Tom Finlay, Tom Kusztos, Tom Lu, Victoria Perry, Wendy McLaren.

Members' news

Sadly Leon Walkden died on Boxing Day after a period of being in and out of hospital. He was 83 and many of you will have strong memories of him over the years as he was a totally committed member.



He is seen here in 1993 together with Ron Roberts, Dennis Warnford-Davis and Roy Romain as the British and European record holders for both the 280+ Freestyle and Medley 4x50m relays. Leon was at the mile this year with his wife Joan whom he married 3 months ago, but he did not swim. However he did compete in the Mile 2 years ago, got a bronze medal at the World Championships at Rimini 2/3 years ago, and was a regular at Masters championships. He will be missed by us all.

Shortly after the New Year we also lost Roy Smith. Roy was Hon. Secretary from 1970-6 and a member since 1962. He was an organiser of the schools matches and remained an enthusiastic and ever cheerful supporter events like the Golf where he was seen this year. We have lost a good man.

Rhys Hopkins is the new life member, having been with us since the early 90s. As an active Marine we see him rarely as he sorts the world out.

Denis Lean doyen of members (since 1925) is still going strong and is an active supporter from his home in Perth. The oldest Active member is Cliff Stossel who swears he still swims regularly.

Alan Gill, a member from his school days in 1953 and one of our Australia based members, has made a plaque

of the Otter logo. He would be happy to make others if anyone is interested.

For regular occupants of lane 6 the event of the year has been Dennis Warnford-Davis' new knees. Having made a rapid recovery expectations are high of a competitive come-back. Readers will be spared the photographic evidence, but here is a photo of a youthful Dennis in flight!.



Although a few others have been members for an equal period of time, Charles Doxat decided to celebrate his 50 years as a member. Old Otters emerged from obscurity or elsewhere to celebrate the event, together with more recent members.



Scott Woodley is deeply involved in LWPL and has been a club referee.

At the other end of the age scale the Hon. Auditor's family has been making its mark. Gemma Deacon made her first full international polo appearance for GB under

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20's at a 6 nation tournament in Felgueiras in Portugal. She played in all 5 games, scored in one (a 9-2 defeat of the perfidious French) and, in true Otter fashion, succeeded in getting wrapped up (3 majors) in the same game. GB came 4th overall.

SWIMMING

Regional Meets

London Regions: Crystal Palace

Few people mourned the passing of the old Southern Counties... but only because the inaugural London Regionals were practically identical apart from a few technicalities.

And it was very much a case of "new format, same old story" with regard to Otter dominance in the pool. Captain Fiona Marshall dominated the sprint events in an equal long course pb for 50m breaststroke (35.67), also blitzing the 50m (29.09) and 100m (1.04.25) freestyle, and earning a clean sweep of gold medals.

Swimmer of the meet goes to Dr Alex Freeloove, who posted a scorching 60.9 for his 100 freestyle, followed by a 1.08 in the 100m fly and 29.5 for the 50m fly.

Race of the meet was a hotly contested – some might say X-rated – male Otter three-way in the 100m fly. With King of Fly (not to be confused with the Fly King), Derek Parr, taking on the young pretenders, Dr F and Andy Hudson, it was very much a case of "youth" versus experience. This time "youth" triumphed, with Dr F taking the honours, Hudson following in 1.12 and Derek closely behind. The youngsters were noticeably absent in the 200m fly, allowing Derek to show his class and romp home to victory.

Congratulations to Otter newcomers Sophie Hemsworth and Ben Thomas, who competed in the freestyle and backstroke, respectively. Well done also to Katie Goodall for her pb in the 50m backstroke (35.0).

In the relays, the Otter 100+ ladies dominated, setting the fastest times for all the age groups in the free (Fiona, Katie, Sophie, Gina Hobson) and medley (Katie, Fiona, Gina and Lauren Edwards). Jason, Andy, Fiona and Gina cruised to victory in the 120+ mixed free relay. In the 240+ men's events, the elite team of Ted, Derek, Mike and Tony wiped the floor with the competition.

On Sunday the 200m freestyle saw Lauren came up on top with a 2.24 (having gone out in a speedy 1.08), with Rhiannon Guy posting a 2.27. In the 400 freestyle Gina came home in 5.01, Katherine Mearman posted 5.13 and Rhiannon finished in 5.05

Isle of Wight

Twelve optimistic Otters left the safety of the Thames estuary to venture overseas for the first international event of the swimming calendar – the 8th annual Isle of Wight Heights gala.

Gina Hobson, Rhiannon Guy, Katherine Mearman and Roger Philips kicked off proceedings, proving they are made of the "Wight" Stuff in the 800m free. There were strong swims all round as Lauren Edwards, Fiona Marshall, Alex Freeloove and Andy Hudson took on the 100m IM and Ruth Morrison, Matt Staines, Rhiannon, Katherine and Fiona assaulted the 200m free.

Lauren continued her impressive form and finished the weekend with a superb 100m free, while Katie Goodall delivered the now obligatory masterclass in backstroke swimming. Gina posted the fastest ladies Otter time in the 800m free, 50m fly, 50m free and 50m backstroke, leaving Rhiannon the honours in the 400m free (4.55).

The ladies 50m breastroke, however, was surely the "Wight" Wash of the weekend. All seven Otter ladies took to the pool and battled it out for glory in the A group category. Ruth Morrison led home the field to complete a staggering Otter 1,2,3,4,5,6,7!

In the relays events, Gina, Matt, Katie and James Palmer romped home in the mixed freestyle relay. In the mixed medley relay, Ruth, Alex, Andy and Gina teamed up to take gold.

Swansea Race Report

First up and making her debut in an Otter hat was open water specialist Erica Moffett – in a commanding performance she posted a new 2 minute PB of 21.55.89. While Rhiannon set a new long course PB and taking gold in a time of 19.48.59.

Mike Wake rediscovered the long course 800 metre swimmer in him, coming home second in a highly respectable time of 12.00.21. Lesley battled the pain barrier and won the long course 400 IM. In the 200m backstroke Gina blitzed the field and Matt Staines swam 125m further than normal and came home in a very respectable 2.31.37.

It was golds all round in the 50m breastroke as Fiona notched a very impressive 34.97 personal best in the 50m breastroke, Liz came in on 41.76 and Mike also took gold with a 40.62.

In the 50m fly Matt and Alex took gold and silver in 28.36 and 29.67 respectively; Andy was nudged out of the bronze by Camden but banked another new PB in 30.82. Captain Marshall was the sole representative for the Otter ladies in the 100 fly and cruised home in 1.10.74.

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The 100+ mixed relay team (Matt, Fiona, Gina, Ross) was super quick but their 2.02.95 was unfortunately just outside Barnet's record. The mixed freestyle 120+ relay team (Rhiannon, Dr F, Andy and Katie) stormed home in 1.55.8, taking age group gold.

The women's 100+ medley relay team of Katie, Fiona, Rhiannon and Gina led the pack and clocked 2.13.13 to lead the pack home – special mention to Rhiannon for her 32. in the fly.

Barnet Sprint Meet

In the 50m breastroke Gina Hobson and Andy Hudson's pbs and 2nd places were a highlight. Ruth Morrison put in some strong swims in the freestyle and breastroke. Locky Pollard and Adam McCarthy took the dive back into competitive swimming and didn't seem too scarred by the experience, so hopefully we'll see them again soon. Lauren Edwards' moment of the meet was a 'perfect' dive in the 100 breastroke which she promised to go away and replicate in her living room. Also posting strong swims were Roger Phillips, Catherine Couquet, Liz Shaw, and Derek Parr. Swim of the meet was a team effort in the mixed medley, with Lauren and Ruth doing the grunt work early on and allowing Adam and Locky to overhaul the girls from Barnet and Camden to take gold – well done ladies!

The Cambridge Relay Gala

A mixed bag of Otter talent made its way up to the land of the Light Blues to take on the youngsters in their annual season's opener at Parkside. Apart from the hosts, the competition included Nottingham and Hertfordshire universities and a couple of tag-along water polo players.

This year the programme controversially included individual events, as well as the standard relays in all four strokes. Ruth Morrison was her usual dedicated self, clinching a fine victory in the 100m breaststroke and Jane McMenemy swam a storming second 50m to hit the podium in the 100m freestyle. Back on home turf, Dan Mikulskis – wishing he hadn't put on two stones since his time cruising the lanes at Parkside – fared best of the boys, coming home as first loser in the 100m IM (OK, so it was a tough field).

The relays – the real business of the evening – provided ample opportunity for Otter to demonstrate its dearth of backstroking talent, but a big thanks to newcomers Peter Schultz and Flavio Rusconi, who bravely stepped up to the plate and took one for the team by swimming their non-favoured strokes. The girls stormed to victory in the breaststroke and fly relays. Without a doubt the race of the evening was saved to the end – the 8 x 50m mixed freestyle relay.

True to Otter form, the Londoners frontloaded their team, leaving renowned sprinter Katherine Mearman to bring home the bacon by a whisker. Smiles all round.

The National Meets

Sheffield

The Records: Derek Parr lowered the British Record in the 50m fly in his age group to 30.58. Another personal best for Derek! Gina Hobson, Fiona Marshall, Lauren Edwards and Ruth Morrison teamed up to snatch the 100+ years 4 x 50m freestyle British Record from the Barnet Copthall ladies.

Friday: In the 1500m freestyle Katherine Mearman smashed her pb by over a minute, claiming the first Otter gold of the meet. The 100m breastroke followed, with Mike Wake leading the way with a silver in a time of 1.29.23. Then came Liz Shaw, who lowered her pb with a 1.26.22 and picked up a bronze. Finally, the much anticipated head-to-head between Ruth and Fiona resulted in triumph for the ladies' captail (1.16.15) and silver and bronze for Otter. In the 200m freestyle showdown between Locky Pollard and Dan Mikulskis, it was the Englishman (2.02.22) who vanquished his Aussie counterpart (2.05.29). In the ladies, Gina and Jane McMenemy lined up and did battle – Jane taking the honours but needing a pb of 2.14.28 to win by eleven hundredths. In the final event of the evening, the 50m fly, Roger Phillips set the tone with a strong 35.29, inspiring Derek's subsequent record-breaking swim. Gina was the fastest Otter lady (30.96 and 3rd).

Saturday: The fun began with a 400m IM, Lauren Edwards the club's sole representative (would the real Otters please stand up?). She got the day off to a winning start, posting an impressive 5.31.50 (including a pb for her 100m fly!). Next was the 200m breastroke, which saw Ruth storming to overall victory in a time of 2.44.75. In the 50m freestyle debutante Sophie Hemsworth posted a speedy 32.42, but it was Captain Fiona who came away with the fastest lady award with a bronze-winning 28.01. Matt Staines wound up as top Otter in a time of 25.00 (age group silver), James Palmer next in a pb of 26.69. In the 200m fly Michele Senecal went 11 seconds [sic] faster than her Stanford time and claimed 2nd in her age. In the mixed freestyle relays, the Otter 100+ team (Matt, Dan, Fiona, Gina) metaphorically nailed the GB Police and were tantalisingly close to claiming the British Record. The 120+ team bagged a very respectable bronze in their age, and the 200+ team (including Catherine Couquet) would have undoubtedly medalled if it weren't for those darn conglomerate teams.

A bevy of Otters lined up to take on the 400m fc. Sue Hill (3rd), Katherine, Gina (pb and 3rd), Michelle (masters pb and 1st) and Jane (pb and 2nd) all took the plunge for

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the ladies. In the 100m IM Dan and Phil snatched a 3rd and 2nd in their respective ages. Fiona claimed 1st, and Lauren made it an Otter 1-2 in the 25-29 age. Entrants in the 200m backstroke were thin on the ground, but Tony Ray showed how it is done by securing a bronze. In the mixed medley relay, the GB Police got their revenge on the 120+ team (Matt, Fiona, Gina, Alex) forcing them to settle with silver.

Sunday: Storming swims and almost negative splitting were the themes for Sue (silver) and Katherine (gold), who took on the 800m freestyle. Ruth and Fiona lined up again for the 50m br claiming and age-group 1-2 finish for Otter. Roger S, James and Matt contested the men's event, with James setting another pb. Rob Alderton scored a fine win in his age in the 50m backstroke in an impressively quick 30.93, and 'Little' Ben Thomas picked up another 4th in the tough X(-rated) age group. The 100m fly was a hotly contested affair with Gina posting a pb of 1.08, closely followed by Lauren (pb of 1.11), Michelle (1.09), and Jane (1.11). The personal best theme continued for Andy and Dr Freelove, as well gold and silver for Derek and Roger Lloyd Mostyn. In the 240+, Rogers S and LM, Mike and Phil picked up silver. Lesley Davies and Katherine took on the 200m IM, with both ladies smashing their entry times. In the blue riband event, the 100m freestyle, Dan finished top of the Otter pile but it was party-time for Andy and Alex who both dipped under 59 secs for the first time. Of the ladies, Gina nosed ahead, although it was Ruth, Liz and Sophie who posted new (masters) pbs. Start of the weekend came from Jane in this event, who notched up a sizzling reaction time of 0.36s! In the 100m backstroke Ben finally picked up a (bronze) medal! The men's 100+/120+ medley relay team (Matt, James, Alex, Andy) took to the blocks and picked up a well deserved silver. And the 120+ ladies (Gina, Ruth, Jane, Lauren) romped home to victory. All in all another great Nationals for the Otters. Bring on 2007.

International Swim Meets

Barcelona

Nine intrepid Otters spent a long weekend in Barcelona under the pretence of swimming in the Open Catalan Masters competition.

Relative Otter newcomer to the swimming side of things, Alex Starling had chosen this event as a suitable inaugural masters meet for him to test his swimming (in)capabilities. A wise decision. The fantastic pool – cunningly hidden in a nondescript Basque suburb – featured a marvellous sliding roof¹, thus allowing the pool to be bathed in soothing Spring Mediterranean sunshine.

¹ Engineers are fascinated by the simplest things

To be honest, the swimming itself was secondary, but everyone came away with at least one swim they were happy with – the tour organisers even managed to rig a race for Alex to pick up a debut medal (bronze was claimed only after 23 other competitors pulled out and a further 17 were disqualified). And Fiona and Mike snatched a couple of impressive trophies for swims with the highest number of FINA points (Fiona as the overall female winner with her 50 breaststroke and Mike for his age group with his 100 freestyle). All in all a fantastic weekend; this meet will definitely be added to the international Otter calendar in future years.

World Masters Championships; Stanford, California

A small team of Otters made the trip to San Francisco for the World Masters Championships held at Stanford University. Lesley Davies, Michelle Senecal, Fiona Marshall, Ross Croasdell, Matt Staines & Alex Freelove were joined by new Otter (based in Indiana) Frank Smardo. Derek Parr also made the journey.

Derek Parr: European Record Holder and World Champion

In the 200m fly Derek's masterful pacing saw him storm home to victory. Derek trounced the field and lowered his own British and European record with a new mark of 2.46.06. The highlight had to be the finish – with Derek blowing kisses to his family in the stands, and the Otter crowd on poolside, as the rest of the field finished the race.

Otter Relay Dominance: Silver Medal for Mixed Medley 100+ Team

The Otter mixed relay team of Ross Croasdell (backstroke), Fiona Marshall (breaststroke), Michelle Senecal (butterfly) and Matt Staines (freestyle) came in for a silver medal in the 100+ Medley Relay event in a time of 2.02.57 – second only to Stanford.

The men competed in two relays, the medley and the freestyle. They placed 14th in the medley relay, and managed to get disqualified in their freestyle relay – allegedly for an illegal takeover by Ross.

The Rest of the Swims

We had a few PBs (Fiona 100 breaststroke, Alex 50 freestyle in the relay), some top 10 finishes (Fiona and Michelle), and some grudge matches between the boys in their 50m events. And, it turns out Matt really is a breaststroker, as his top placing was in that event!

Next world championships takes place in Perth 2008.

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CLUB EVENTS

Otter Golf – by Mark Grundy

Another great day took place at Royal Wimbledon G.C. when Otter golfing stars past and present displayed their skills at lunch and on the course! The worthy winner was Andrew Craig with David Miller a good second. Although only 8 otters played golf but a pleasing 18 attended the lunch. A good time was had by all and the hope is that this will become a regular expanding occasion! Thanks to all who took part and congratulations to Andrew on his club-swinging prowess.

The Mile – Windsor

21 Otters braved the Thames water for this year's Mile race down the Thames. The handicapper was on good form and it took an inspired swim from Nicole Freeman to win the event. Second place was awarded to Susan Pearce, closely followed by John Iliffe in 3rd.



In the scratch race it was Aussie speedster Locky Pollard who cruised home over a minute ahead of anyone else in a time of 18.22. Susan Pearce picked up her second 2nd place of the evening and Tim Fraser came home in 3rd. Congratulations to everyone for taking part and to everyone who organized.



Half Mile – Henley

25 swimming Otters, plus a fair few land-based ones, made the annual trip to Henley to take on the half mile swim. Deirdre Ward navigated all other Otters, and a particularly ferocious swan, to pick up eight club championship points and first place. Alex Freelove was second with the generously handicapped Hugh Turner in 3rd.



A huge thank you to the Henley team, who once again co-ordinated a fantastic evening, including a first-rate BBQ. Thanks to all the helpers who ensured that everyone was accounted.

Quarter Mile

Nineteen hardy Otters braved a relatively balmy Serpentine lido for the final open water swim of the season. Early reports suggested that Bronwen Bew might have beaten the Handicapper for the 2nd year running, but unfortunately (for Bronwen, at least) there had been a mix up with the start times, thus relegating the young lass from top spot. Next to finish was Xavier

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Williams, but he fell foul to the 3 Otter Swims rule. Thus it was Jason Parrish, suitably attired in his fastskin (was it for warmth, speed, or to try and reduce the amount of green slime in pants?) who walked away with maximum points and the trophy. Second came Locky Pollard and Michelle Senecal claimed third place. Special mention to Roger Phillips, who competed in his first Otter open water race, although, sadly, he seemed to suggest there wouldn't be a second!

The overall Open Water Trophy this year goes to polo lady supreme, Nicole Freeman, whose persistence in the open water events definitely paid off – well done Nicole! There wasn't much separating the top 3 though – Nicole claimed 12 points, Locky was 2nd with 11 and Deirdre Ward 3rd on 10.

The Handicap – Final Results

Thank you to everyone who took part in the final handicap event of the year the 400m IM. It's much appreciated when there's an enthusiastic bunch who want to give it a go. Matt Klaefling totally fooled the handicapper and finished top of the pile, Katherine Mearman came in 2nd and Dan Cotton completed the podium. However, none of the top 3 were close enough to trouble the overall Handicap winner, "Little" Ben Thomas. He amassed 33 points to claim the coveted trophy. Having demonstrated impeccable turns through the 400m IM, Michelle Senecal just held onto 2nd place overall, with 26 points. And a strong finishing Katherine claimed 3rd on 24 points. A total of 109 Otters took part in the various Handicap races over the course of the year – with winners from all lanes there is no excuse not take part in 2007!

La Santa, Lanzarote, 2006

The Warm Up

For the uninitiated, the annual training camp consists of a week in the Canary Islands' mecca of sporting excellence, Club La Santa. Training is in the outdoor 50m pool with 2 hours of coached sessions every morning and afternoon and plenty of time to take part in the plethora of other activities offered during the day. The most popular of which is sleeping.

This year 21 Otters made the pilgrimage. This is their story.

The Main Set

Coach Nicole the Merciless stood on the deck. She was disappointed. So far this week the motley bunch of swimmers ploughing a lonely furrow up the pool had

only swum about 30km – and they had been here nearly 2 days. To be fair, about 15km of that had been butterfly, but this was no time for fairness, this was time for THE TALK.

Nikki Ludgrove spluttered up to the end of the lane, breathing like a prank caller and still trying to count to nine so that she could do the hypoxic breathing set properly. Andy Hudson held on to the lane rope, trying to think of a good excuse to sneak out of the afternoon session. They needed THE TALK.

'Guys, you aren't putting enough effort in. I think you need to give me more commitment. You're letting Otter down. You're letting Swimming down. But most of all, you're letting...'

James Palmer wandered back from his fourth toilet break of the session. He nodded sagely. She was right, those two slackers really were letting themselves down.

'...and I don't know what you're shaking your head for Peaches. You haven't put any effort in since you got here'.

They had had THE TALK.

Nicole the Destroyer moved over to lane 3 where the distance swimmers were grinding out even more meters under the now blistering sun. And Lauren Edwards was in tears. It was a bit of a problem as she still had her goggles on and they were filling up from the inside. But the coach can't hear you sob when you're under water so it didn't matter. She was trying to finish the 3rd 800m in a row before it finished her. Lauren completed the session so exhausted she couldn't move from the sun lounger for the rest of the day. Or even rub in sun cream. It was 30C and sunny. She is very brown.

Just behind her, Michelle Senecal appeared to be perfecting some kind of new finger drag drill set only this version seemed to require her to drag the whole arm back through the water. When Michelle last graced competitive swimming she was capable of 200m butterfly in under 2m 20s and apparently you never lose that kind of talent. Unfortunately you do lose the ability to get your arms out of the water.

Gina Hobson had applied so much suncream that if Ruth Morison paddling along behind were a wild bird she would have been lost without trace in the oil slick. Meanwhile, Katherine Mearman (channel swimmer, round Manhattan Island swimmer, cold water championships babe of the year) was just getting into her stride. For some people the first 10km are still the warm up.

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Nicola the Hun gave a satisfied smile and moved over to lane 1 to find new opportunities to spread pain and misery. La Santa newbies Crystelle Micciche, Catherine Couquette and Jorg Hample were manfully stroking through the suncream glistening water. Trailing along behind, Roger Philips was undaunted by the bandages strapping up his dislocated finger and was still swimming down the middle of the lane. Rumours that it was Nicole the Barbarian who had pulled the finger out of joint pour encourager les autres were unconfirmed but as yet undenied. Mike Wake and Matt Johnson were taking no chances as they ground out another length.

As the session drew to a close, Nicole the Deadly surveyed her watery empire. They could moan about this session all they liked, only she new what was in store for tomorrows main set...

The kick set

It wasn't only swimming.

Matt, Gina, Lauren and Nikki went out three days early and surfed the La Santa swell.

Ruth and Jane celebrated getting another year closer to a new age band and gave us a karaoke rendition to remember.

Mike, Andy and Roger toured the island on bikes.

James and Lauren finished the aquathon in style.

Matt 'Jordan' Johnson dunked us all through a basketball game.

Jane, Gina, Andy and James showed why Britain hasn't produced a Wimbledon winner in 60 years.

Andy sharked his way round the pool table.

Danny braved the heat for numerous runs.

The crazy golf course took its toll on numerous people (if Tiger can complete a 7000 yd championship course in 68 strokes, why does it take 84 to go about 100yds?)

Sparkly cocktails were consumed by all in Puerto del Carmen.

The La Santa disco witnessed moves that John Travolta only dreams of.

Ruth (see photo) served a bomb to win the beach volleyball.



Enough Iron man milk shakes and La Santa sandwiches were consumed to feed an army.

And who could forget the last day gala with everyone giving it all (or at least what was left) in one big Otter competitive showdown. Long live team Pufferfish...

The Warm Down

A massive thanks to Gina for organising another great week in La Santa. A huge thanks to Nicole for keeping us all going and making sure we all pushed ourselves beyond that comfort zone. A big thanks to Ruth for assisting in the coaching throughout the week.

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OPEN WATER SWIMMING

Cold Water Swimming Championships

Tooting Lido :: January 2006
by Buzz Hendricks

What do you get if you cross a freezing cold January, Tooting Lido's Centenary and London's inaugural Cold Water Swimming Championships? Answer: ten [very fool-] hardy Otters.

The event kicked off with that long-neglected classic – the 33 yards old English backstroke, which saw Katie Hope storm to victory. Otter then secured four medals in the 33 yard breaststroke, Lachlan "Locky" Pollard and Paul McCann picking up age group silvers. Matt Johnson wowed the crowd with a stylish 26.31s. Rachel Joyce (gold) and Katie Hope (bronze) demonstrated the benefits of plenty of "head up" breaststroke practice. Nikki Ludgrove (28.58s) and Katherine Mearman (29.78s) also braved the cold in this event.

In the 33 yards backstroke, Katie Goodall destroyed the field to win the event by over two seconds, with Katie Hope taking age group gold. There were also more medals for Otter boys Locky (silver) and Paul (gold).

A hypothermia-inducing 66 yard freestyle event was the icing on the deep-frozen ice cream of the day's activities. Locky belied any gentle giant pretensions by ruthlessly sweeping to victory in 34.38s, closely followed by Paul (age group gold) and Tim Kendall (age group silver). Andy Hudson – very much a warm-blooded beast – clocked 39.53s before promising never to do anything quite so silly ever again. In the women's event there were more impressive swims from Katie, Katherine (bronze), Cat Cassidy and Rachel (silver).

Thanks to South London Swimming Club for hosting such a well organised and fun event, and to all the Otter support – there was lots of it!

Manhattan Island Swim – Relay Competition

New York :: 24 June 2006
by Katie Goodall

Otter swimmers are used to taking on slightly crazy challenges, but this one surely takes the biscuit. 28.5 miles counter-clockwise Manhattan Island, anyone? Heavy recruiting at last year's Annual Dinner had resulted in a hand-picked, select crop of Otter's finest – Hayley Attwood, Gary Chow, Katie Goodall, Sarah Skennerton, Dave Stannard and Deirdre Ward – willing to take on the challenge.

Weather more akin to the other NyLon city (rain, wind and fog) unfortunately dashed any sun-drenched any lingering American Dreams, leaving our hardy Otters

with extremely soggy pelts as they reported for duty at 4:20am in Battery Park. Armed with race observer, very dodgy rowing boat, designer bin bag rainwear and enough bagels to sink the Queen Mary the Otter squad made its way to the start. The plan was simple enough – what could possibly go wrong? Lead swimmer sets off and picks up safety kayaker to navigate first section of course. Lead swimmer is joined by escort boat and transition takes place after forty five minutes.

The reality: lead swimmer sets off. There is no kayaker. Lead swimmer grabs spare kayaker. Escort boat attempts to identify lead swimmer. Lead swimmer is one of 40 other swimmers sprinting along the East River all wearing yellow hats. Escort boat starts tracking female swimmer (lead swimmer is male). Escort boat realises mistake and tracks male swimmer from opposing team. Escort boat eventually sights lead swimmer at front of the pack thus necessitating quick sprint to Williamsburg Bridge before transition.

After a storming swim by Dave it was up to the rest of us to take up the gauntlet and take on the challenges of the East and Harlem Rivers. How would the Otters fare? Everyone rose to the occasion fantastically and despite a near "jellyfish down swimming costume incident", the team reached the second check point well in touch with the leading corporate teams ready to take them on in a sprint finish down the Hudson.

Having played cat to UBS' mouse for much of the Northern section of the Harlem River, a particularly well executed line under Spuyten Duyvil bridge by Dave saw us move up the field to 4th. It was then that the heavens opened and we were forced to make an unscheduled stop under the George Washington Bridge. But cold and wet conditions are, after all, an Otter's natural environment and it was here that the winter weather training regime came to the fore. Despite poor visibility, some strong swimming from Sarah and Deirdre saw Team Otter successfully negotiate the River State Park sewage disposal unit, leaving Gary to bring the team home in 4th in 7:47:14, winning the six-person relay category by a clear 50 minutes. A brilliant result – especially considering that one of the teams in the top three contained an ex-Olympian.

Manhattan Island Swim – Solo Competition

New York :: 24 June 2006
by Katherine Mearman

A marathon swim around Manhattan Island is not to be undertaken lightly, especially on the back of being unable to get out of bed for four days in the fortnight before the race. However, a lethal (for some) cocktail of antibiotics, vitamins and food did the trick for me just in time.

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Standing on the dock at South Cove, Battery Park, in the pouring rain at 5.30am, it seemed doubtful that the race would actually start. We had just witnessed the most almighty thunderstorm and jumping into the surf really didn't seem like a very good idea at all. But in we jumped and off we went. I latched on to a friendly kayaker (Dave) and off we went, happily avoiding the 'bad' currents that want to whisk you off to Rhode Island.

We were not far up the East river before Dave and I were joined by Team Mearman on the main support boat. Sarah and dad did a super job keeping my spirits up and ensuring I got fed at the right time. My dad's singing possibly made Team Mearman one of the noisiest boats on the water (aside from perhaps the Otter Relay Team) and the whiteboard saw extensive use for messaging.

Frustratingly a nasty storm at the five hour mark resulted in an enforced rest on the support boat. Having just hit the "home straight" into the Hudson, I would have much preferred to power home and get some rest after crossing the finishing line.

We were soon back in the water and it was a 'Mear' two hours later that I was racing down the West side of Manhattan, past huge cruise ships and taking in some fantastic views of the famous skyline. With Lady Liberty and Dave the Kayaker guiding my way it seemed only natural to forego my last feed and race for home. Flying in on the tide I apparently clocked seven knots, too fast for the support crew on dry land who didn't even have time to unfurl the England flag on my way in!

Somehow I managed to make the turn back into South cove (very difficult given how fast the current was carrying me) and finished the swim in a respectable 7:25, classifying me as 3rd fastest female and fastest British solo swimmer. A great day despite the weather!

BLDSA Coniston swim

Coniston :: 16th July
by Buzz Hendricks

Warm water, baking sun, splendid scenery: 50 swimmers in, 50 swimmers out. John Iliffe (age 74!) completed the swim in 3:12, a new personal best. Good work, John!

Swimming Across the (ex) Iron Curtain

Austria / Hungary :: Summer 2006
by Peter Grace

One of the great things about open water swimming is there a disproportionate number of courses which cross national borders and where you get to spend time in no-man's land where no policeman has jurisdiction.

I was privileged to take part in an event over a very unusual course – across the old Iron Curtain into a landlocked country. It was only the fourth time the event had been held, but numbers have doubled each year and the field reached eighty this year. The significance of the event is made even more poignant by the fact that the lake was a primary escape route from Communism. A few kilometres away is the land crossing where hundreds of East Germans queued in the Summer of 1989 in their Trabants and Zsigolis, anticipating the border being opened by the Hungarians, providing the trigger for the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union. The rest, as one is wont to say, is history.

However, slightly defying history, the route of this race was TO Hungary FROM Austria. Weather conditions were perfect for the 4.2 km swim – hot, clear skies and following wind. We found our way down through half a mile of thick reed beds to the pier and onto the venerable double-decker water-bus for our trip to the start on the Austrian side. We passed a series of thatched houses on stilts before finally pulling in at the final one in the row, a mere half kilometre travelled.

Bizarrely this was the border station. Heavily uniformed Hungarian and Austrian border guards swept in to check our passports and confirm that we had no illicit imports / exports secreted on our bodies – even though we were all wearing only swimming trunks / costumes. Would we need to check in on the way back, I wondered?

En route we also passed a forelorn EU flag, leaning out of the water. Presumably it once marked the border of the EU, and it's kept for nostalgic reasons.

The swim itself was fast. With the wind behind us most of the field took a dog-leg route via the customs house. I clocked in after about 60 minutes in 7th place having decided to take the straight course. Of course unconventionality has a price in this part of the world, and I was stopped. After a certain amount of mutual haranguing, I was allowed to continue, by which time I found myself traversing a dinghy-boat competition AND leading a visually challenged paralympic sportsman. I was duly pipped at the post, but only once he had spotted the flags atop it!

One thing I should be clear on. This event was not intended to be a competition – so times were not given out. As if to emphasise this, we were all given a tasty picnic lunch in addition to the standard tea shirt and certificate!

Haven't you heard they do ferries now?

Channel Swim – Katie Hope :: 21st July 2006
by Katie Hope

Otter Swimming Club Annual Report

The “ferry question” is a pretty typical question when people find out you are going to swim the channel, along with the usual “do you have breaks on the boat?”, “will you be wearing a wetsuit?” and “ooh, what about sharks?” And of course a classic male question – “will you have to smother yourself in whale fat?” But mainly people want to know: “Why?”

I lay the blame on “King of the Channel” Kevin Murphy’s shoulders. I met him at Uxbridge lido and he told me I could do it and thus the seed of an idea was planted. This seed quickly took root and, after three other Otters claimed the Channel, I was inspired enough to get going. I booked to swim the channel in August 2004 and turned up at the harbour, bag of melted mini rolls in hand, (the channel swimmer’s food of choice I’d been told!) to start training.

But, cruelly, it wasn’t to be. The tide I was due to swim on was wiped out due to high winds. I waited another two tides and like many people that summer, ended up training until late September but never got the chance to swim. Because quite a few of the people I had trained with that summer also didn’t get a chance to swim that year, it made it an easier decision to come back for another Summer.

Having done it all before made training so much easier and I couldn’t wait to get down to the serious business of taking on my first attempt. To cut a long story short, after twelve hours I began to fade and my crew made the tricky call to pull me out of the water.

I was furious – it seemed so cruel to pluck me out of the water with France in sight and only about three miles left to swim. No sooner was I on the boat, however, that fury turned to alarm when it became obvious (a very loud gargling sound!) that I had salt water on my lungs. Off to hospital and a night on Oxygen. Basically, I had almost drowned – thanks to my crew for spotting the signs! With hindsight I should have maintained better communications with the boat and I may not have got into such a dangerous situation.

Although I felt weak and breathless for the next week, I just couldn’t sleep. I stayed awake plotting how I could get back into the Channel before the end of the season, thinking I had to have my chance again and that the ending just wasn’t right. Everyone was asking whether I was really ready to get back in and – despite secretly having my doubts – I just couldn’t conceive of not giving it another crack. After all the work and preparation I was desperate for another chance.

Back so soon?

Luckily my pilot Neil kindly managed to squeeze me in again and just under three weeks later I set out to swim the channel again, feeling sure I had to make it this time. The sun was shining, I had great conditions, a

very experienced crew and everything seemed meant to be.

Driving down the night before I felt relief that one way or another it would soon all be over with. That is just not the right attitude to swim the channel. You have to want to be there, to *really* want it badly.

After fifteen hours – and less than a mile from the lighthouse – my whole crew was yelling at me to put in one last effort. But I was just exhausted... I had forgotten why I was swimming and even where to.

Although I saw the lighthouse, it meant nothing to me as I assumed I’d missed the point (I didn’t realise you could miss it and then be swept back towards it) and I clearly didn’t have the focus to continue. I vaguely remember lying in the water with my arms and legs stretched out in a swimming-like motion but not actually swimming. Cliff, one of my crew, got in to see how I was and made the decision I wasn’t fit to continue.

Unlike the first time I felt complete and utter relief.

Later I realised that mentally, probably a lot more than physically, I just wasn’t ready to get back in. The channel is above all a mental challenge and it’s not over until it’s over. You have to be prepared to swim for as long as it takes and that could be a lot longer than you ever realised.

Third time lucky!

I think these were the valuable lessons I took into my swim this summer. It took me a long time to decide whether to do it again. Apart from anything else the training takes up so much time and I was worried I’d strained the patience of friends and family to the maximum.

A smaller crew accompanied me this time and this worked better for everyone. From my water-based point of view it all seemed really calm and organised. My swim had started around 7.30am with me charging into the sea and whizzing off at a very unsustainable 77 strokes a minute. The sun was shining and I felt happy and excited. But quite early on, at around 2hours I started to feel pretty bad. The water seemed choppy and I was finding it really hard to keep my eyes open and to focus. I was violently sick on my 3rd feed and felt much better.

From then on it was a matter of just keeping swimming. Very soon I can see France out of the corner of my eye every time I breathed to the left. At first I didn’t believe it and kept trying to avoid looking as I knew that although it looked close it was still a long way off. I tried to breathe lower and when I still caught glimpses decided to pretend it was something else: a big tanker or a whale or something, anything but France!

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I then noticed that the whole crew then huddled in the cabin, suspiciously as if something was up. At the next feed I asked if this was my last feed and everyone looked a bit shifty and awkward – the answer was no. Apparently the tide had shifted and I was being whisked further along the coast. I knew I just had to keep my head down and keep going but it wasn't fun or exciting anymore it was just tiring.

After what seemed like an age I started to get concerned that the sun was setting – would I be swimming in the dark? Not a happy prospect. Thankfully, the next feed heralded that wonderful phrase – "it's your last feed". I was so exhausted, however, that I didn't really react, but it wasn't too long before there was solid land beneath my feet. I was incredulous – it seemed a ludicrous idea having been horizontal for so long that I should be able to stand up. I ran through the waist-deep water and hit blessed dry land. I had done it!

I was pretty gutted that I had to swim back the last 500m to the boat. I climbed up the steps to see everyone looking really happy. "I did it!" I said, promptly vomited everywhere and then went to sleep. I had done it – I had finally swum to France!

Channel Success – by Erica Moffett

English Channel :: 6 September 2006
by Erica Moffett

At 11:49pm BST I stood up on the French shore after swimming for 14 hours and 19 minutes. It was, to say the least, an incredibly satisfying moment, having trained three years for this swim.

I feel immensely fortunate that everything came together for a successful swim. No Channel crossing is guaranteed, as I discovered while waiting for my day in Dover. The day before my swim, four swimmers started from Shakespeare Beach and none of them made it. I was supposed to have started that day as well, but my boat pilot called it off at the last minute. "Tomorrow looks like the better day", he said, and it was the right call. Though it meant a stronger spring tide, the clouds and fog cleared, the wind was light, and the sun shone on my back the entire day. After the sun bade us goodnight, the moonlight led me to France.

In total, I swam 28.5 miles – a distance that even makes me wonder how I swam that far! The water temperature was 17 degrees the entire way across, and I never felt cold – even in the dark, thanks to countless hours of cold water training. My pilot and crew were absolutely superb. In the end, it is a long swim, and it is a tough swim, but that is what makes it a great swim.

Another Channel Feat

Laura Lopez also completed a Channel crossing in 2006, her second, in 15 hours 21 minutes, more than an hour faster than her previous success. This lays to rest the emotions of two previous unsuccessful attempts, the last one was just a month previously. Congratulations to Laura!

MULTI -SPORTS

Otter wins Great Wall half Marathon - by Barbara Woodward

Chris Owens (stalwart of many Otter multi-sports teams and of lane four on Mondays) stormed to victory in the Great Wall half marathon. This was Chris's first international running title and the first Otter win in this illustrious and demanding race.

The race starts at sea level in a picturesque fort, built by the Ming dynasty Emperors to keep out invading hordes of barbarians (and Otters, presumably), but after passing a grazing camel on your left, the race turns sharply up hill. The New York marathon's heartbreak hill is a mere dimple compared to this ascent which snakes up the hill for 5km. No time to draw breath there; you are on your hands and knees scrambling up some rough hewn steps to get on to the Great Wall itself. The route then follows the Wall for a further 4 km of steps – steep ones at that (which rather baffled a group of Californians who thought that step classes would help them ace this section of the race). The transition from up-steps to down-steps is punctuated by ninety degree turns through dark watch towers and the punishing finale to this bit is a suite of 576 steps back to the fort.

The race isn't even half over at this, the 8.5km, point. After a chance to refuel and wave to admirers and spectators in the fort, the course heads off (past the camel again) to the local village, where it snakes round the village; up to the fields, down dirt tracks, through narrow alleys to the bemusement of the locals. It is at least mostly flat and provided a chance for Chris to extend his lead further.



How do I know this? Because, for the honour and glory of Otter swimming club, I ran the race myself, but with significantly less (OK, almost no) distinction. I can still walk, but I conclude that, since water does not flow uphill, there is no good reason for swimmers to do so either.

Longest Day Ironman – by Rhian Martin

I did it! And I now fully understand why the race is called 'the longest day'! It was the toughest physical & mental challenge I have ever done. What a way to spend my gardening leave...

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Day started early, getting up at 4 am, forced down my porridge and energy drink. Nerves started to kick in as realisation hit, no turning back!

Felt strong on the swim, so strong in fact I decided to add on another 100m+ by trying to swim around the wrong buoy and a canoeist had to come after me and get me back on the right course. I was out the swim 4th overall, beaten by 3 guys (2 of whom were in relay teams, so 2nd individual out), well ahead of the next lady. Including transition (which even included a sit down to take my wetsuit off!), I was out in one hour.

Continued to feel strong on the bike and nutrition was going well (I can safely say I will not be having an energy bar/gel/drink for a very long time!). The course was undulating apart from the last twenty miles which was really hilly – just to kill your legs off before the run. Ben, Dad & Lyn were zooming around cheering every 10-20miles which helped loads. 6 hours 18 (inc T2). I came into second transition as female race leader (28 minutes up) and to massive cheers & encouragement from my 'entourage'.

Then on to the marathon (my first one ever!). Felt OK for the first half, then with a 'mere' 13 miles to go I hit the wall. In 5k I managed to lose the lead and regress to a shuffle. I had never previously experienced anything like it... your body is screaming at you ("no, I do *not* want to take another step"). Adopted a 4 min shuffle / 1 min walk strategy for the last ten kilometres. I made it to the finish in 12 hours 39 min – unfortunately not as fast as my dad's time, but in the end I was just pleased to finish!

I crossed the line with the Welsh flag held high with a massive grin on my face! I also managed to raise a fantastic £3050 for St Anne's. Thank you every one for all your donations & support up to the event.

SCOTTISH MIDDLE DISTANCE TRIATHLON CHAMPIONSHIPS - by Rachel Joyce

On Friday 18 August, a trio of Otter ladies made the journey to Aberfeldy in Scotland for the Scottish Middle Distance Championships. The half ironman distance (1900 m swim, 90 km bike and half marathon run) is never easy but combined with Loch Tay's 14 degree waters and the Perthshire hills and you've got a toughie!

Jane McMenemy and Rachel Joyce decided they were game for the challenge, and were joined by Lydia Kan who did a sterling job as support team not just to the Otter duo but all the competitors. After an eventful train journey up (1 train became 4 and 5 hours became 7!!), Rach and Jane were met by Lydia at Glasgow station

who loaded the girls into the car and drove them up to Aberfeldy. First stop was registration where it was possible to glean some local knowledge about the course. Not sure this was a good thing: it confirmed that hills were to be expected but also introduced a new hazard – pigs which apparently chased competitors as they struggled up the last hill of the cycle course!?! With that, it was time to get out and go to the local Italian to stock up on those carbs! Luckily the owners had been forewarned of the influx of triathletes, and big bowls of pasta were served up to all.

Race day arrived and nerves were high. Luckily the steady rain had subsided and the sun deigned actually to make an appearance. The swim was pretty chilly but Jane and Rach were not put off and made it a one-two out of the Loch (beating most of the men too!). There was no dilly-dallying in transition and thus began the 90km cycle.

The nutrition strategy on the bike had been discussed at some length and both Rach and Jane were packed up with enough energy gels and "Go" bars to feed an army. A good job too as the hills started almost immediately with a forty minute plus climb followed by a pretty steep descent to Loch Rannoch. The beautiful scenery offered a little consolation on the cycle course which circumvented the Loch before tackling the sharp ascent on the way back to Aberfeldy... luckily no pigs (or hogs for that matter) in sight! This was pretty tough on those tired legs but after that competitors were rewarded with a speedy descent back into the second transition area in Aberfeldy.

While Jane and Rach were off on their bikes, Lydia was taking charge of the first feed station on the 13.1 mile run course in her official marshalling attire! As you would expect, the station was run with precision, all set to hand out water and more energy gels to the tired athletes who would soon be running past!

Rach reached the 2nd transition leading the women's race and, after picking up tips from James "Transition Guru" Palmer, was out on the run in less than a minute. However, she might choose to learn a thing or two from Jane who took the time to put some socks on... and so didn't finish with ten blisters! Like the bike, the run was not flat and although this was OK to begin with by the turn around any slight incline felt like the ascent to Everest. To add insult to injury the turn around point was at the bottom of a hill!

Rach was the first woman home by 8 minutes and Jane missed the top ten by one placing. The team resisted the temptation of cracking open the bottle of whisky prize and instead celebrated at the local Tandoori!

Otter Swimming Club Annual Report

WATER POLO

2006 season

Otter 2nd team report

The season began with great optimism – inclusion in the re-formed National League division 4, promotion to London League division 1, and the revamped leadership package of Paul McCann and Ed Buckley – yet we struggled to match the early form of the previous year.

An easy win against strugglers Bexley was followed by a narrower victory at Cranleigh and a loss to Penguin 2. Some fairly solid results on tour in Spain followed and we returned again to perform unconvincingly with a draw and a loss at home to some frankly weak opposition. Our one saving grace was our two wins against Hornchurch. Games against this team are never short of goals and the away fixture finished 12-9, with the return leg ending up 17-15.

Training at the fantastic facilities of Crystal Palace and Whitgift was hugely beneficial and a mid-summer game away to Watford kick-started the team's goal-scoring with a 12-5 win. There followed victories against Kingston (14-6) and Penguin (17-4), just in time for the National League, which is where the focus of the season lay. We later found out that we had come second in the London League to Hornchurch, due to the draw. While disappointing to finish second, it was still a great result.

And so to National League, which had been in the thoughts of many for several years – finally a chance for Otter to show their strength in depth at a national level.

The first weekend took us to Sheffield and the amazing Ponds Forge pool. All four divisions were playing over the weekend and it was quite the water polo spectacle. The opening match against Ealing was always going to be tough. They are a notoriously physical side and with their European imports bulking up the roster, they had skill and shooting prowess to boot. A narrow loss 16-14 showed that it would be a long fight for success in this division. Jason Eckert stood out with 7 goals. The Sunday afternoon game against Cambridge was considerably easier. Eckert put away another 7 and even captain McCann contributed a brace, to lead the team to a deserved 16-13 win.

Weekend two saw us play closer to home at Crowborough in the heart of East Sussex – not quite an international standard facility. The Saturday match was against University of Bristol who were the early leaders of the division. Coachless but bolstered by a full squad of 13, a Chris Eden goal settled the team down, with an edgy first period finishing 1-1. Bristol forged a 1-goal

lead at the half but a 5-3 third period and a 2-0 final period sealed the win for Otter. Sunday's match was going to be tight too.

With a 10am start against the team placed second after Sheffield, the two key players were identified. Despite this, each of them contributed a goal and it wasn't until Eden again opened the scoring that Otter got on the scoresheet. However Birmingham's key players each scored again with a fifth from a random player and it was only Ollie Holman's goal towards the end of the period that brought the team back into it. Otter's lack of focus continued, allowing Birmingham to score another three, yet Yannick Gaudio and Greg Moore, with a delightful lob, countering the Birmingham goal-fest. 8-4 down at half time and all seemed lost. But this is no average second team and Otter put in another 5-goal third quarter; experience and fitness starting to show while the Brummie coach tore at his already sparse hair. 9-10 and one quarter to play. Sarpel Ustunel completed a brace for the match to tie it up at 10-10 but mistakes at crucial times and a pair of goals from the opposition danger men sealed a win for the Midlanders.

The next weekend meant a trip to Walsall and three matches across the two days. Despite a slight panic due to the captain and vice-captain deciding to take a leisurely coffee on the way, leaving us temporarily without balls, caps and half the team, we kicked off against London rivals Croydon Amphibians. An easy win ensued as Otter won every quarter and took the match 17-8 winners. Eckert scored five while Eden, Pierre Cerri (for once free from man-marking duties), Gaudio and Leon Estrella each bagged a brace.

Cambridge was first up on the Sunday, heartened by their 21-12 thrashing of Ealing the afternoon before. However, strengthened by the arrival of Ustunel and Nick Edelman, again Otter never looked in trouble despite the seemingly tight scoreline, leading almost all the way through the match and finishing 13-12 victors. Eckert, Gaudio and Holman bagged hat-tricks and Juan Aldana on his NL début got two beauties, the second lobbing from a tight angle.

Invicta Marlins would be the final opponents of this demanding weekend. Watching their previous matches it was obvious that they enjoyed swimming, and with one particularly dangerous shooter they were certainly likely to be a test. A poor opening quarter saw Otter go down 3-1 and despite a fierce struggle, never managed to come back into it. A freakish Invicta goal from half-way just before the half-time buzzer seemed to epitomize the match we were having. Greg Pienaar topscored with two well-taken man-up goals from the posts but the final result of 10-13 was disappointing.

A return to Walsall two weeks later brought rematches with Birmingham and Bristol. With Birmingham missing one of their key players from the first encounter, Otter

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spirits were high, especially with the boost of the added firepower of Alfonso Tucay. This showed as Otter raced to a 2-0 lead inside the opening couple of minutes, Gaudio and Eckert opening their accounts for the weekend. Eden added a third with a screamer from distance, although sloppy defending let the opposition back into the game, 3-3 at the first quarter. Cerri's man-marking on the dangerous number 5 was a real match-winner as he was kept to just a penalty goal. An Eckert pair and an Eden penalty in the second period took Otter ahead at the half, 6-5. Birmingham fought hard but from then on it was all about Tucay, as he scored 4 of the next 6 goals, sealing a 12-11 win.

Otter were greeted with the welcome absence of Bristol's ex-GB centre-forward on Sunday morning and despite two of the team being unable to hold the ball, a 4-1 opening quarter effectively put Bristol out of the match. Gaudio top-scored with 4.

And so to Crawley for the fifth and final weekend of competition. Bristol and Birmingham had already completed their fixtures and due to results at the second Walsall weekend, Otter had the destiny of the title in their hands. A victory against Croydon was taken for granted yet the South Londoners came out the stronger despite Cerri's opening strike, leading 3-2 at the quarter and 6-5 at the half. However, Otter's superior fitness, composure and experience saw them through with a 6-2 second half, Tucay scoring 4 and Ustunel's brace leading the scorers. Eden's breakaway goal in the last minute put Otter clear of any danger.

An Invicta victory against Ealing meant that Otter just required a win against Invicta on Sunday morning to seal the title and the celebrations would begin. A loss would leave Invicta champions due to the better results between the two teams but still the chance of promotion through the play-offs. A close opening period saw Otter edge ahead 3-2 through Eden, Tucay and Estrella. Invicta weren't going to give in and fought back to 6-6 at the half, Tucay, again, and Gaudio – with two extra-man goals – answering. It looked all over as Invicta put away 5 goals in the third quarter to Otter's 3 (Tucay picking up another 2) and then a score in the first minute of the fourth. But an inspired 4 minute spell led by some chancey play by Ustunel (2) helped Otter to recover to 12-12.

So, a win against Ealing and the div four title would be joining the div two title won by the first team a fortnight before. Gaudio finally broke the deadlock after 3 minutes with a man-up goal from the post and this led to a veritable goal-fest as 8 more goals were scored, Otter leading 5-4, as Gaudio picking up a second and Tucay netting a hat-trick in just over 1 minute of play. A strong second period saw Otter race ahead to 8-5. As seems to have been the case most of the season, though, third periods are not our forte and it turned out to be a nightmare one as Ealing fought their way back

into it, tying the match up 10-10, and pulling ahead 11-10 soon into the final period. But this team never gives up and a penalty save by Buckley, his second of the match, inspired a 4-2 finish to the match, Estrella slotting home a couple more (his second effectively the match winner) with Tucay sealing a double hat-trick match and Eckert getting his 30th of the season. Of particular note was Ustunel's centre-back play as he limited the Ealing danger-man and division 4 top-scorer to just one goal.

NWPL Chairman Steve Monico presents the Div 4 trophy to Otter Captain Paul McCan



In short, a hugely successful season for Otter Men's Water Polo and the second team. This victory is testament to the strength in depth that the squad possesses, and to the coaching of Tim Kendall. It isn't easy training a squad of 35 players and running two National League teams and this success has been a fitting tribute to his dedication over the past few years. 2007 will be a hugely exciting year and surely this team can only improve with the solid core of talent that has been cultivated.

Otter 1st team report

2006 has been a great year for Otter. After a slow start, and a lot of close games, a convincing win in the last game of the season helped Otter reclaim the National

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league Division 2 trophy. This puts Otter back in the top division of British Water Polo at the first time of asking.

The season started with the unfortunate annual exodus of Otters to foreign lands. Special mention has to go to retiring captain Alex Kovatchev, who returned to his native Canada. Despite this, the core of the 1st team remained and hopes were high for the new season.

These hopes were quickly brought back down to earth as a weakened side fell to 3 convincing defeats in the first round of the ASA cup. A successful tour to Madrid followed, though the success was seen more in Madrid's bars than their pools.

At the start of the London league season it was clear that the team needed to start winning some games, however, yet initial form was patchy. Strong performances at home, including a first quarter demolition of Beckenham by left-handers Fabre, Rotsey and Kuztos, were contrasted with some disappointing away defeats. As always, it proved difficult to explain to some of our players that jumping in the shallow end is not allowed. The opportunity for a 100% home record at ULU was lost against Avondale midway through the season, however, impressive displays in other games meant this was our only home loss. The grudge home game against Penguin resulted in a 14-12, victory providing optimism for the forthcoming national league campaign. Our struggles away from home meant that, despite a late surge, we could only manage a third place finish.

As national league approached our ranks were bolstered with a number of the now expected foreign imports, this time from New Zealand and Australia. This foreign influx, mixed with "home grown" talent from such glamorous places as Swindon, Essex, Crewe and even North London, created great optimism for the new season.

For the first weekend in Loughborough our team on paper looked the strongest Otter had put out since 2004. However, things didn't really go our way, with some dubious interpretations of the rules from the referees utterly bemusing Otter's foreign contingent. In the first game against newly promoted Caledonia, the team didn't really gel. Once our coach Tim was sent from poolside at the halfway stage (after disputing another strange decision), things didn't look good. We managed to stay in the game but finished with a disappointing 13-12 defeat.

The game on Sunday was similarly scrappy, but we at least managed to scramble a point with 9-9 draw against Leeds. Leaving the first weekend with a solitary point was not encouraging, but our destiny was still in our own hands.

Fortunately, results improved as the season progressed. Table-topping Solihull were thumped 13-6 with hat-tricks each from Boldon, Rotsey and Hammond. Apart from this, Otter stuck to the 'close games' theme. Early on a Sunday morning against a young and energetic Invicta side, Otter conceded a 9-3 scoreline halfway through the match, yet stormed back with seven unanswered goals to grab a 10-9 lead, only for Invicta to equalise late on. Tyldesley were seen away by a Venter goal in a close fought 15-14 victory. Despite the dropped point, this looked like it could have been the turning point of the season, as another defeat at this point may have put us out of the running.

The third weekend resulted in three solid victories 14-12, 9-8 and 15-6 against Hucknall, Invicta and Reading. Goals were spread throughout the team, but the likes of Venter, Hotchkiss, Hammond, Rotsey and Pillar continued good goalscoring form.

At Lancaster, Otter gained revenge over Caledonia with a solid 10-6 victory and then mercilessly thrashed Reading 18-6. At this point four more wins would have seen us reclaim the title in the final weekend; however we came up against a Leeds side bolstered by two Hungarian ex-professionals. A series of missed opportunities compounded by breakaway goals at the other end meant we were always chasing the game. The 8-14 final score did not reflect the fact that this was a game we should have won.

Coming into the final weekend, 3 victories would have secured a play off place. However, leaders Solihull slipped to a crushing defeat to Tydlesley, 3 victories would now give Otter the title.

Otter could never get away from Hucknall in the first match with each team going almost goal for goal. The game was finally decided with a goal from captain Boldon with 90 seconds remaining in a 12-11 victory. The much anticipated top of the table clash with Solihull came on Saturday evening. Despite a close score through the game, the result was never really in doubt and goals from the returning Ainley(2) and Maese in the final quarter secured a 10-6 victory.

The stage was set for the final day showdown with Tyldesley, who boasted the division's top scorer, Cowburn, in their ranks. It was expected that if he could be kept quiet the title would be ours. As expected the game was very physical – captain Boldon was seen tussling with Cowburn in the pit and had to call for a new hat after his initial one was literally ripped to shreds. At 4-2 to Otter, the decisive moment came, frustrated by our strong defence, Cowburn took out his anger by headbutting Hotchkiss following a kick-out. Brutality was called and the game was as good as over. Otter cruised to a 15-7 victory with four goals each for Venter and Rotsey.

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NWPL Chairman, Steve Monico presents the Div II Trophy to Otter Captain Eric Boldon



So Otter walked away with the Division two trophy, rumoured to hold approximately a bottle of champagne if needed. Kiwi Jacques Venter finished the season top scorer with an impressive 38 goals. Aussie Ian Hammond finished as major queen with 14 despite a late challenge from the returning Ainley who started where he left off two years ago picking up the most majors per game played.



Left to Right : Tim Kendall (Coach), Owen Job, Shaun Hotchkiss, Xavier Williams, Giacomo Gozzi, Andrew Piller, Alan Rotsey, Carl Ainley, Ben Tausig, Jacques Ventner, Ian Hammond, Sasha Maese, Graeme Gunthorp, with Eric Boldon (Captain) kneeling.

The good signs for next year are that almost all of the 2006 squad will remain for the 2007 season; with another year playing together it will be very interesting to see how the team can perform in division 1.

Holland 2006

The summer saw the ladies' and men's second teams returning once again to Culembourg in Holland for a pre-season tour. We also played some water polo.

Following a barbecue and a tequila relay, the party really started when WE made it to the marquee. The obligatory limbo dancing competition livened things up and introduced us to our Dutch opponents - they knew from that moment on that we were a force to be reckoned with! Nicole Freeman did her best to improve US-Belgium relations across the course of the weekend and Grant did his best to make everyone feel very ill with two rounds of the foulest vodka known to mankind.

Both the men and women started the competition with convincing wins, although allegedly some of the men's first opposition hadn't yet got their 25m swimming badges. The ladies ambitiously decided to enter two teams this year but due to late withdrawals, those in attendance had to play for both teams (which the guys enjoyed).

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The men's second game against the local team was blighted by some severely biased refereeing, with the arbitrator - clearly a lover of steak and kidney pies - forgetting he had a whistle for large portions of the game (well, when we had the ball). But we like a good fight.

The ladies continued to impress with their stamina, determination and performance and that was even more on show in the evening. After a downpour that was more befitting our home country, we cranked it up with some drinking games in the mansion and eventually migrated to the marquee to wreak havoc once more.

With no inspirational dress code this year, some of the men were surprisingly withdrawn – I guess that's 3 days drinking and sampling the local “cuisine” in Belgium and Holland for you – and there was no guest dancing by Andy and his wine bottles to accompany the band. Frenchy took on the challenge, though, and managed to lose his shirt around 20 times, cut a few rugs and almost get into a brawl with a far more sober 6'6" local! Young Jo was living up to her namesake's reputation, breaking hearts (and pulling records) all over the place, and Nicole Mahoney decided she needed not one, but two escorts for the night. Bronwen was not impressed.

Sunday was painful to say the least but the men managed to finish with two wins and claimed the runner-up spot for the second year running. Maybe next year they'll play against over-15s. The ladies had their intra-team face-off, with only one side showing up (to win by no contest, seven players were made to get in the freezing cold water and score a couple of goals – what a sense of humour the Dutch have!) and they finished third and fourth, cunningly avoiding the play-off final match.

Polo moments of the tour for both teams came on the Sunday. Jason had missed a hat-full of chances already in the first game, so as the ball was sent downfield yet again, we were all naturally anticipating another fluffed effort. Young TJ Kenny decided to voice some encouragement with (imagine strong German accent) “don't waste it, don't waste it”. This was shortly followed by “that's what I'm talking about” as yet another goal went begging. The ladies' moment was not alcohol-

induced – more by a desire not to have to play again. So in a match where victory would have meant a play-off for the title, the ladies gave a demonstration of exhibition polo. Even they were watching as the opposition were allowed to score a bunch of goals unopposed (unmarked and unchallenged).

All in all, it was another successful tour – here's to next year!