

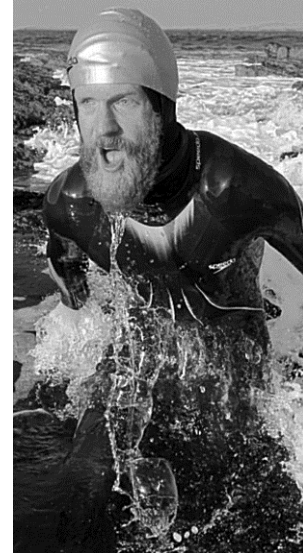
### Sean Conway swims the length of the British coastline

#### HELL AND HIGH WATER

by Sean Conway

(Ebury Press £10.99)

- 1 As usual with books about crazed adventures and daft derring-do, this one, about the author's attempt to swim the length of the British coastline, begins with an account of the 20 involved. However, very unusual for such books and adventures, Sean Conway's account is mainly about what he hasn't thought of doing.
- 2 Just weeks before he's due to dive into the sea off Land's End, he hasn't done any training or sought any funding and has no 'plan' to speak of. Nor is this some long-held ambition of his. Indeed, it seems that he only thought of this ultra-long-distance swim up the British coast because his attempt to cycle around the world didn't happen as he'd have wished – all was going well until he had a crash and, although he completed the pan-global bike ride, it couldn't get him into the Guinness World Records. So, the swim is meant to fill that crucial gap in his CV.
- 3 Somehow, he manages to acquire three people to act as his support crew and a cut-price yacht, leaving £110 in his budget for everything else – supplies, equipment, the lot. Not surprisingly, there are those who tell him he's crazy and that he'd be best off spending his last £110 on the medication his GP would surely be only too happy to prescribe. But on our hero ploughs, and eventually manages to get his support crew to Land's End to start his Big Swim.
- 4 Only to discover two problems. First, there's the temperature: 'I slowly walked into the water,' Conway recalls, 'and was surprised at how cold it was.' Right . . . Turns out the sea is not only cold, it apparently also has these things called tides. As he's settling down to his first crawl, it begins to dawn on Conway that he'll have to time his swims so that he's going with the tide rather than against it – because even Michael Phelps<sup>1)</sup> at full tilt wouldn't be a match for the current and would start to go backwards. Which is exactly what happens to Conway.
- 5 Soon after, there's another problem – seasickness, for Conway, as well as two of his support crew. There are lots and lots of other dangers ahead, almost all of them coming as a shock to our fearless swimmer.



6 Between Cornwall and the north coast of Scotland, there will be whirlpools, riptides, the mountainous seas off Cape Wrath, busy shipping lanes, a tornado warning and toxic jellyfish. Plus his scabby toe gets worse daily, his wetsuit doesn't fit properly, he has to eat about 8,000 calories a day, often in mid-swim, and the protein shakes are giving him wind, something dreadful.

7 Conway's original 'plan' was that he'd be swimming for two months. Some thousand miles of coastline, 15 miles a day, 60 days' swimming. Simple! Well, not quite. His daily distance is initially so low that, by his new calculations, it will take him two years to reach John o'Groats.

8 Then, amazingly, he starts to grind out the miles. More calamities lie in store – running out of money, losing members of his support crew – but Conway copes with them all. And, astonishingly, remarkably and record-breakingly, 135 days after he walked into the surprisingly cold sea off Land's End, he swims into John o'Groats' harbour.

adapted from an article from *Daily Mail*, 2015

noot 1 Michael Phelps: Amerikaanse zwemmer die meerdere gouden olympische medailles heeft gewonnen