

Sir John Royden completes 70k Lake Geneva challenge!

Sir John Royden (John) has now swam the full 70km length of Lake Geneva in 33 hours of swimming and raised over £420,000 for [The Brain Tumour Charity](#), a cause very close to his heart after losing his dear sister, Emma, to the devastating disease in 2003.

More people have walked on the moon than have completed what is known as 'the ultimate trophy swim' and, although John completed the swim in two parts, he can still claim to have completed it; no one else has ever attempted it and gone back to finish it off!

John covered a staggering 42km in 22 hours of swimming in July 2021 from Chateau Chillon at the eastern edge of Lake Geneva to Thonon les Bains and then completed the final 28km from Thonon les Bains to the Bain de Paquis in Geneva on 26 July this year in 11 hours and 15 minutes. Technically, this does mean that John is the ninth person to swim the full length of Lake Geneva. What an absolute hero!

After his first swim in 2021, John vowed to return in 2022 to complete the distance and said *"I have been completely overwhelmed by the number of people who have supported my efforts to swim Lake Geneva. I am committed to completing the swim to honour every person and every single penny donated."*

On taking on the final leg this year, John said *"I swam the Channel in 1993 and noticed that I felt that I had more "swim" in me at the finish and ever since then I have felt that I could have done more than a Channel. Then in 2003 my dear sister Emma died and ever since then I have been saying to myself that I must do something charitable in her memory. The trouble is that these big endurance events take up huge amounts of weekend and holiday time as well as not being cheap and so they can only really be pursued with the full support of one's family and my very supportive employer JM Finn. This also allowed 100% of donations to go directly to The Brain Tumour Charity with no costs taken from the funds raised"*.

Difficult start in 2020

John originally planned the epic 'Mad Swim' for 2020 but was of course delayed due to the global pandemic. This also made training exceptionally difficult with most pools closed or facing significant restrictions on traveling to open water spaces well into the spring of 2021. However, John has a determined and creative mind and had several ingenious ways to get swim fit. These included:

- Using a series of pulley's attached to a bench to go through the arm motions of swimming
- Being tied to a tree in a Sussex farm pond to swim 'geo-statically' so as to negate frequent changes of direction
- Swimming against the strong currents in his mother's stretch of the river Coln in Gloucestershire and friends' Burford Mill pool.

John's training was also additionally hampered by not being able to have swimming lessons to improve his technique and efficiency in the water.

John said *"I found a great coach with Ray Gibbs of Swim Canary Wharf but we could not actually meet because of COVID restrictions during much of 2020 and 2021. The swimming technique has evolved considerably since my Channel swim 29 years ago and I had still not mastered the new stroke at the time of my 2021 attempt of Lake Geneva"*.

Once COVID19 restrictions lifted, John was able to swim in his preferred locations of Dover Harbour with Dover Channel Training and in Lake 86 of the Cotswold Water Park.

July 2021 – Swim part one

At the end of July 2021, John swam for 22 hours and covered a truly amazing 42km of non-stop swimming through day and night before being pulled from the water for suspected hypothermia by the safety crew on board the boat.

John said *“After 22 hours I did not have hypothermia. I was just exhausted and my swim speed had dropped to less than 1 km per hour. 2.5 – 3km an hour is more like the speed needed to crack Lake Geneva in one go. That said, 2021 was a bad year for swimming in Europe. The weather had been very wet and cold and the only weather window required us to start at 12:00 midday as opposed to a preferred start time of 8am. The late start pretty much condemned me to swimming for two nights and one day rather than two days and one night which is what you get with an 8am start”*.

July 2022 – Swim part two

In July 2022, John returned to the GPS marked location to finish the final 28km of Lake Geneva. Swimming for 11 hours and 15 minutes, John arrived to a very warm welcome at the Bain des Paquis in Geneva where a small crowd had congregated to welcome him in.

John said *“The swim went according to plan and was helped by having the wind blowing towards Geneva, but on the other hand hindered by quite large waves”*.

The need for change

Brain tumours are the biggest cancer killer of children and adults under 40 and they reduce life expectancy by an average of 27 years – the highest of any cancer. Despite these stark statistics, research into brain tumours is woefully underfunded with less than 3% of the yearly UK cancer research spend going to this devastating cancer type.

In September last year, John and Sarah were warmly welcomed into The Brain Tumour Charity’s office in Fleet, Hampshire, to meet the team and learn more about the work The Charity does to support those with a brain tumour and their families as well as the pioneering research that The Charity invests in around the world.

Sarah said *“John and I were overwhelmed with the reception that we received. The entire office had lined up to greet us with waving banners, clapping and whooping! It’s not often that John and I get to feel like Royalty but on that day we did. But we were more than aware that we were there as representatives of everybody who had donated to our fund raising efforts and felt very humbled by the experience”*.

Through their exceptional support to The Charity, John and Sarah have also met several people diagnosed with a brain tumour and their families and have been truly moved hearing about the experiences that the families have been through. Meeting Young Ambassador to The Brain Tumour Charity, Laura Nuttall, and her family was hugely inspiring for John and Sarah and the families have stayed in touch since then.

Laura said *“We were also inspired by John and his amazing feat of stamina and endurance. I’ve seen Lake Geneva and know how big it is, this is one serious challenge!”*

Another poignant introduction for John and Sarah was meeting the remarkable Owen Copland and his family. Owen was studying drama at John Moores University in Liverpool when he was diagnosed with a GBM in November 2020. Very sadly, Owen passed away from his brain tumour on Christmas Day last year. Owen was just 21 years of age.

John said *“We wish we had a magic wand to wave at every brain tumour sufferer that we met because they have all been outstanding individuals surrounded by incredible, loving and supportive families.*

The realistic best that we can do is continue our fund raising in the hope that the great Brain Tumour Charity funded research continues to push back against this appalling disease."

Thank you

After the finish, John said "I could not have completed the swim without the exceptional support of my partner, Sarah Bone, and huge numbers of incredibly kind friends and family who gave up most of their summer weekends to come and watch me swimming and ensuring I was fed, watered and nutritionally balanced in Dover Harbour and at Lake 86 in the Cotswolds. I was doing back-to-back ten hour swims on Saturdays and Sundays in 2021 with slightly less in 2022. I can promise you that driving to these locations to watch me swim around in circles from what was often a very cold and rainy Dover Beach takes a lot of love and dedication. In particular, I would like to mention my mother, Diana Royden, friends, Chris and Sandie Russell, Sally and Darren Williams from the Brain Tumour Charity as well as Claire and Dan Bevan who often had us to stay at their home close to Dover. I'd also like to mention Ghislaine Couvillat, who lent Sarah and me her flat on the shores of Lake Geneva".

The biggest thank you to every who kindly donated

John has, to date, raised over £420,000 for The Brain Tumour Charity which is testament to the love and respect that John, Sarah and his whole family thanks to the incredible generosity of all of those who helped with donations.

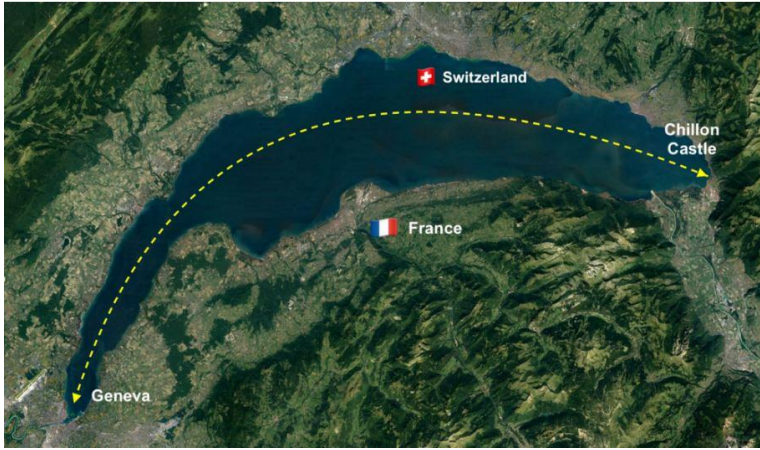
John said, "Life is certainly for living and if I can make a difference during my lifetime, I'll be very happy. Research into brain tumours is expensive and I know every penny of the money raised will make a difference, helping to find a cure and kinder treatments for the disease. Things just have to change for this woefully underfunded research into this cancer."

"I'm pleased to be supporting such a brilliant charity who are making real impact every day. I've had such humbling, kind and generous support for my swim which means a great deal to me in memory of Emma and really warms my heart."

"All I have done, really, is gone for a swim. In my own mind, I have stopped measuring the funds raised in pounds, shillings and pence and started to measure the impact in extra years of life and extra quality years that post-operative brain tumour patients can now enjoy: full mental and physical capacity and able to lead normal lives after their treatment. And that is thanks to you and your donations".

Just Giving - <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/johnsmadswim>

Some photos of the challenge



The 70kms route from Chateau Chillon in the east to Geneva in the west



Dover Harbour training 2021



Completing the 2 x 10 hour qualifying swims at Lake 86 at the Cotswold Water Park in 2021



Support Crew 2021!



Starting the swim from Chateau Chillon in 2021



The Swim Part Two!



Finishing the swim in Geneva 2022



Celebrations!



Emma; John's reason why