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Jim ‘The Shark’ Dreyer: Man who swam 51 hours towing a ton of bricks reveals hallucinations, GPS errors and moments of near death all for charity

By Nina Golgowski - NEW YORK DAILY NEWS - Aug 14, 2013 at 9:27 am



Jim Dreyer spent 51 hours swimming across Lake St. Clair to benefit Michigan's Habitat for Humanity while overcoming hallucinations, GPS errors and moments of near death. (Cornerstone Strength)

He swam 51 hours while pulling a ton of bricks and overcoming hallucinations, GPS errors and feared moments of near death.

After what was expected to be a 22 mile, 30-hour swim towing two dinghies packed with 334 bricks, Jim "the Shark" Dreyer surfaced last Wednesday in Detroit with an incredible tale to tell.

"It was 51 hours without sleep," he told the Daily News by phone of his both physical and mental battle that coursed Lake St. Clair beginning Aug. 5 to benefit Michigan's [Habitat for Humanity](#).

"What happened — and it always happens in a very long swim — the second night, due to exertion and sleep deprivation, you start hallucinating," he said.

"Some of the hallucinations were kind of entertaining," he laughed. "I'd see a ghost ship about ready to run me over.

"The hallucinations not so entertaining," he said, were the GPS failures. "I actually did get lost, right before sun up that second night."

Relying on his own guidance after years of breaking long-distance records and extreme training, he pushed forward with his underlying mission to help and inspire the people of Michigan.



'The Shark' swam a 22-mile stretch across Lake St. Clair to reach Detroit's Belle Isle Park beginning Aug. 5 and ending Aug. 7. (Carlos Osorio/AP)

"There are a lot of people here in the state of Michigan trying to keep their heads above water," he explained. "We don't have to sink with the weight of our burdens. If one man can pull a ton of bricks 22 miles, then what can we accomplish if we all pull together?"

With the bricks symbolizing the state's need to rebuild and each piece destined to be [sold off for charity](#), he continued on before facing what he'd describe as the greatest near failure of his trip: his ropes snapping.

After gradual strain, a line connecting to a dinghy broke in the dead of the night.

Hoping to save his so-called "train of pain," he climbed on top to tie them together, side by side, which worked pretty well he said until he nervously found himself tangled up between them in the lines.

"I'm getting crushed between them. This is like 2:30 in the morning the first night," he said. "I think, 'I'm either going to drown between the lines or I'm going to crush myself.'"

The end result, as time would tell, would be the loss of one of the two dinghies after relentlessly towing it for 18 hours.



Throughout his solo swim he battled the loss of supplies, a hand flipper, as well as one of his dinghies carrying half of his bricks. (Carlos Osorio/AP)

"Which was so demoralizing," he said of that moment. Adding to his frustration, "It didn't feel any lighter."

By the second night, the hallucinations began setting in.

Becoming lost he hit what he believed to be the edge of a river with its seemingly deadly concrete edge drawing nearer.

"I thought I was at a dam. I thought I was about to go over a dam," he recalled of his initial fear.

He was swimming circles trying to figure out where he was when he spotted a flashlight shining on shore that belonged to a Detroit TV station's photographer.

"I started yelling at him," he said, asking the man where he was and how to get back to the lake.



One week after he started his trek his lost dinghy was discovered washed up on a nearby shore and its bricks, pictured, returned for their sale to benefit Michigan's Habitat for Humanity. (Jim Dreyer/via Facebook)

This all of course came to the total confusion of the man, said Dreyer, whose answer launched a brief argument on who was right.

Meanwhile back on dry land, Dreyer's fans and other curious spectators were showing their own worry for him on his Facebook page.

The tracking device used to follow him online was no longer working and when it did finally come back on, he appeared in places they least expected.

A boat was set out by his team to check on him, but he waved them off as being fine.

He admits it "did send a few people into a panic."

Relief came just before noon Wednesday when his eyes laid sight on his long-sought destination of Belle Isle.



Just before noon, Wednesday, the extreme long-distance swimmer emerged from the water with his arms triumphantly raised in the air to awaiting fans, spectators and news crews. (Carlos Osorio/AP)

There, walking up to dry land with crowds of locals, reporters, friends and family to greet him, he fell to the ground and raised his arms triumphantly in the air -- both white hands seen as the puniest pair around.

This moment proved not just physically relieving, but his most emotional, too, he'd soon learn.

"This woman took me aside and she was crying," he said. "She said, 'You know, a lot of people think the problem with Detroit is apathy,'" she said. "'It's that people of Detroit have given up hope.

'I had to come out to the beach to see this,'" she told him.

"She just burst into tears," Dreyer recalled. "She said, 'today you gave me my life back, today you restored my hope.'

"At that point, I'm choking back tears, we're embracing. I told her, your words have touched me as much as I touched you.'



After giving a press conference while undergoing an immediate physical by an awaiting doctor, Dreyer was greeted by a Detroit woman who emotionally expressed her renewed faith in her city thanks to him. (Carlos Osorio/AP)

"If she was the only person who got that message, the message of hope, all this was worth it," Dreyer said.

Today Dryer still has yet to complete a full night's sleep while busily making his way through piled media requests and discussing his next plans.

After the second dinghies' bricks washed on shore this week, all are to be sold to benefit Michigan's Habitat for Humanity projects. Others are also expected to be featured in an upcoming auction after signed by not only The Shark, but celebrities as well.

As for his next swimming adventure, he doesn't scratch New York off his list.

"New York City is on my radar screen," he said. "You never know what announcement will be next. I have not forgotten about New York City and some of the devastation that took place," he said while chiefly naming 2012's Hurricane Sandy.

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