



# SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

Patrick was able to utilise his rowing skills and had our blades entering the water in vague synchronicity to each other. We ended up back on the bank after an enjoyable two hour session.

That was the spills, now it was time for the chills!

On September 15, when I was still in demob mood after my Ironman in Holland a week earlier, I had signed up to do something that had always taken my fancy – Coasteering.

Basically, its jumping from a height into the sea and splashing about like a three year old – sounds good to me! I was in Ballintoy harbour before 10 am to meet up with my instructor.

There are two sessions a day and usually groups of 7 or 8 show up.

They also cater for Hen Parties, Stag parties, student groups, family outings etc.

The only members of my anticipated group however had re-scheduled so it was me and my tod only – I had nowhere to hide. I was given the obligatory wetsuit, helmet, life jacket, and neoprene gloves. The setting was spectacular.

I have always thought Ballintoy was as pretty a harbour as you could find anywhere in the world and its no wonder that Game of Thrones have used it for lots of filming.

Despite never having seen a minute of GOT in my life, it doesn't surprise me that hoards of tourists turn up from all over the world. In fact, as we walked out of the car park suitably



Gravity-1 PJ-0. NCL49-09s

booted and suited, another van load arrived to be given a plastic sword and smock each so that they could pretend to be Lord somebody or other and they could pretend to be an extra in GOT.

I thought they were mad (but they probably had a similar view of what I was about to do as well). Before I knew

it, we clambered out to a rock and I was then instructed to jump 12 feet into a pool of water knowing that my feet would hit the bottom (albeit it was sandy) to absorb the impact.

The instructor had a waterproof camera and he jumped in first, swam to the left, got the camera out and then shouted "jump!" so like

a lemming, I did.

It's been a long time since I jumped off any height.

When I was a wee nipper, we were all taken down to the William Street Baths in Derry and thrown off the top board. If you could make it to the side you could obviously swim and if you couldn't make it to the side then somebody jumped in to rescue you! But I used to love the jump and the explosion of the water. Fifty-five years later, I was wondering where that love of heights had gone. He wanted me to do it a second and third time, the format was to put your arms by your side and jump in like a pencil.

If you put your arms out you could get a bit of collateral damage. Anyway, 12 feet done and dusted! Now, what's next?

We then slipped and slithered our way out over a causeway pausing only to eat some sea spaghetti (I kid you not) then we swam out to a fairly imposing bit of cliff and scrambled out when the tide allowed us and started to climb. Suddenly I found myself at the top of a 20ft jump, why did this look an awful lot more serious than a 12 foot?

This was when it started to get serious. I was advised not to look down as your body and head tend to go in that direction and you can end up with the wrong bit of you smashing into the water.

You have to look straight ahead, it sounds easy, but the natural tendency is to look at the fate that is rapidly coming your way....Bang, I was in the water and it was really chilly, this brought back bad memories of my really freezing swim in Almere the week before but at least this time I was getting out of the water every few minutes.

The second jump was 22.5 feet, where you really start to pick up some speed.

The sea is 15 metres deep here so there is no danger of hitting the bottom. Third time we clambered up the cliff this time to a 25 ft. point for the last jump off this particular cliff.

The next two seconds of your life tend to go fairly fast.

We had to do this one at an angle to take account of the particular rock and I didn't get this one quite right so it stung a bit then the fateful conversation began, "Do you want to do the last one i.e. the big one?" "Tell me about it" as I spat out sea water and bobbed up and down like a cork in the waves.

"Its that cliff there, its 45 feet, only about 15% of people manage to do it though", that of course, was like a red rag to a bull. "I 'm in, lets do it!"

We swam out to the adjacent promontory, I say swam but in a life jacket and a helmet you are doing more

sprinkling than that time but three seconds can also seem like a very long time in mid air, your heart seems to stop even though your pulse is doing 200 beats a minute, but thanks to Isaac Newtown, you eventually do come down with a BANG and an underwater explosion as you pierce the surface of the Irish Sea and go way down deep but eventually like a cork, you are shot back up and before you know it, you are back on the surface, grinning like a Cheshire cat where the main feelings are both of unbridled joy and also relief.

We made it over the bay and then started to climb up and up and up. Eventually, there was no more cliff just a lot of blue sky above and a lot of black water beneath, and I was told what rock to use as my very last launch pad. I found out later that (a) some people walk back down and (b) some folk take up to 15 minutes to steel themselves for what lay ahead.

I walked out to the edge and looked over and promptly bottled it. "Come on Pete", I said to myself, "No guts, no glory, this is your post Ironman treat remember, you signed up for this, you are here voluntarily. Think of the humiliation if you have to creep back down that cliff, whimpering like a woos, man up!"

I walked gingerly out to the edge, I looked at the horizon which seemed an awfully long way away, put my arms down by my side, said my prayers, reminded myself that I had indeed made my Will and took off. It takes three second to fall 45 feet. In fact, when I am standing up, parts of me are 51 ft. above the water. Three seconds is a very short space of time. Usain Bolt can run 30 metres in

I had made it and nothing seemed to be broken (if you get the last jump wrong at 45 feet, its not unknown to break a rib or two) I was still in one piece, full of adrenaline and in the middle of some of the most spectacular coastline in the world. I was of the ocean, in the ocean, immersed in a sea of possibilities – and grateful to Coasteering NI.

I had survived the Thrills of the helicopter ride, the Spills of the paddle board and now the Chills of the sea off Ballintoy – its good to be alive folks, get out there and enjoy the best coastline in the world!



Still afloat...barely! NCL49-14s



Beautiful Benevenagh from the Roe. NCL49-13s