



Ironman Wales 2014.

The Training

Dear Reader

Sunday 14th September 2014, is a date that will be etched in my mind for the rest of my life. That was the date of the first and only Ironman triathlon I have ever entered. In case you are interested in the numbers, an Ironman triathlon includes a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile cycle and a 26.2-mile run. A total distance of 140.6 miles.

I had watched triathlons on TV during the Olympics but that was the extent of my knowledge. I remember the day I got more interested in triathlons. It was sometime during the summer of 2013. I went to a lake not far from my home to watch a triathlon that had been organised by Tri Limits a local triathlon club. My good friend Gary Kidney was competing. It was an Olympic distance which is quite a bit shorter than an Ironman at 1.5km swim, 40km cycle and 10km run. I was captivated by the energy of the event and the idea of combining the swim, cycle and run. Gary was training for an Ironman in England later that year and I really couldn't get my head around how that was even possible. I was baffled!! I knew that it was a real event, and that other people had completed them. In fact, I knew that for some people it was just a race. I even knew a guy who had completed a Decaman, which is 10 Ironman triathlons, one each day for ten days. But in my mind the distances were so great, I just couldn't get my head around how I could ever do something like that.

The other thing that looked like a major challenge was that I hadn't swum in years, and while I could swim, it wasn't something I had done much of or ever been very good at.

Gary completed his Ironman in England later that year and promptly signed up for Ironman Wales the following year. He also started trying to persuade me to join him. I'm pretty sure I laughed the first time he suggested it. In fact, I probably laughed the first ten times he suggested it. My excuses were good ... 'I'm can barely swim' ... 'I've never done any sort of triathlon before, never mind an Ironman' ... 'I've done a bit of running, but I've never even run a half marathon never mind running a full one. And there's no way I'd be able to do that after swimming 2.4 miles and cycling 112 miles.'

He was not put off in the slightest. Even my protestations of, 'Are you mad?' or 'Don't be stupid' fell on deaf ears. In fact, I think they just encouraged him as he ramped up the pressure on me. I knew I wanted to say yes, but I just couldn't see how it was possible in my mind.

At some point around end of October I still didn't know how I was going to do it, but in true 'screw it, let's do it!' style, I said 'OK' and

signed up, giving me about ten months to figure out how I was going to do it. My goal was just to finish it.

I wasn't that worried about the cycle leg as I had covered similar distances. I had done plenty of running but never further than about seven or eight miles, so I needed to put some serious miles in my legs. The swim was my biggest concern. I had never swum more than about 400m in a pool. The Ironman swim was 2.4 miles or 3,862 metres in the sea.

I started to go to the local swimming pool twice a week and just swim for one hour and cover as much distance as I could. I was apprehensive. I hadn't swum lengths since primary school. I wasn't great at the front crawl and started by alternating front crawl and breaststroke. I'd swim three lengths breaststroke then one front crawl. Over time I increased the amount of front crawl to every other length and then to three in every four and eventually to all front crawl. As I increased my lengths my heart rate went higher and breathing became difficult so I was having to take breaks every couple of lengths. Gradually the number of lengths I could swim without having to take a break increased too.

Another challenge was the feeling of panic when my heart rate rose, and my head was under water. Sometimes I'd manage to calm myself down. Sometimes I had to stop, literally mid-length. I eventually learned to keep going by changing to breaststroke until the feeling subsided. I later learned that the panic was just a feeling accompanied by a thought that 'I couldn't breathe' ... and you don't have to believe your thoughts.

At the beginning of 2014 I decided to specifically work on my swim technique. I started attending a 'masterclass' in the pool every week to focus on that. Gradually I got better and faster and started to spend less of my time feeling panic. By the summer I was attending the masterclass and swimming 2.5km twice a week. I was starting to think the 2.4-mile swim might be possible.

I started to focus on my running at the beginning of 2014. I started running short distances or 4-5 miles twice weekly with a longer run at the weekend. Within a few weeks I developed problems with both my

calves and my achilles tendons. I hadn't discovered the importance of strength and conditioning yet and that part of my body wasn't ready for the mileage I wanted to run. Twice between January and April I had to completely stop for at least two weeks to recover and physiotherapy before I was able to resume.

Around the end of March, I started to see that I was limiting my progress by doing too much too soon and by running too fast. On the advice of Gary, I started to slow things down and build my mileage at a much slower pace. It was a case of needing to slow down to speed up, which was very counter intuitive to me. I started to build some momentum. My mileage built each week and by end of July I was running 45-50 miles per week over four runs.

I didn't start cycling at all that year until around April and started by adding two cycles to my weekly schedule. I built my distance and soon increased my mileage to about 140-150 miles per week over three cycles. At this time, I was working as a psychotherapist and had control over the hours I worked. I knew one of the challenges on the day was going to be getting off my bike after 112 miles and starting to run. To get my body adjusted to this, from mid-July until end of August, I took Fridays off each week. On each of these days I left home at 6am on my bike, rode 100 miles, got off my bike and immediately ran for 10 miles. Then every Sunday on those weeks my long run was between 15 and 20 miles.

Something different I would do for sure if I was doing it again would be to hire a specific Ironman coach. I was still at a stage when, figuring it out on my own made more sense. When I signed up I hadn't a clue if or how I could do it, but I knew I wanted to figure it out. Apart from whatever advice I got from Gary who was also getting ready for Wales and the technique training at the swimming masterclasses, I was making it up as I went along. If I was doing it again, I'd hire a coach and go for a time.

When I signed up for the Ironman, I had never done a triathlon of any description and knew I needed to change that. During the run up to 14th September, I completed both an Olympic distance triathlon at Castlewellan, which I think was in May and the Artemis Great Kindrochit

Quadrathlon in July, which I wrote about last week. If you'd like to read about the quadrathlon, click [here](#).

By the time it was ready to travel to Tenby I still hadn't swum 2.4 miles. None of my training had been in the sea and I had only swum in a lake about six times. The rest had been in the pool. I still hadn't run a marathon with my longest run being 20 miles. I had covered the bike distance many times. I had only put the swim, bike and run together once for an Olympic distance triathlon which took around three hours. I had also completed a quadrathlon that took over thirteen hours in pretty rough conditions, so I knew I could dig deep and that I had endurance to keep moving for a long time.



I was going to make it to the start line. The pic above is what the start actually looked like. Would my 'figure it out on my own' preparation be enough to get me round the Ironman?

Would I even get through the swim before the 2 hour 20 minutes cut off. If you don't make the cut off, you get pulled from the race.

I was excited. I was scared. I had moments of doubt. I had moments of certainty. I had Gary in my ear constantly saying, 'No problem to you.' I knew I was going to have to dig deep, I just didn't know how deep yet.

Would what had looked impossible, literally impossible to me just ten months earlier become a reality?

Check out next week's newsletter to find out what happened.

Much love

Peter



Peter McCammon
peter@pm-coaching.co.uk

PS. If you're reading this newsletter, but are not yet on my mailing list, and would like to be, you can sign up [here](#).

PM Coaching

37a Bush Road
Dungannon
BT71 6QE
Ireland



You received this email because you signed up on my website.

[Unsubscribe](#)