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A crossing with a difference

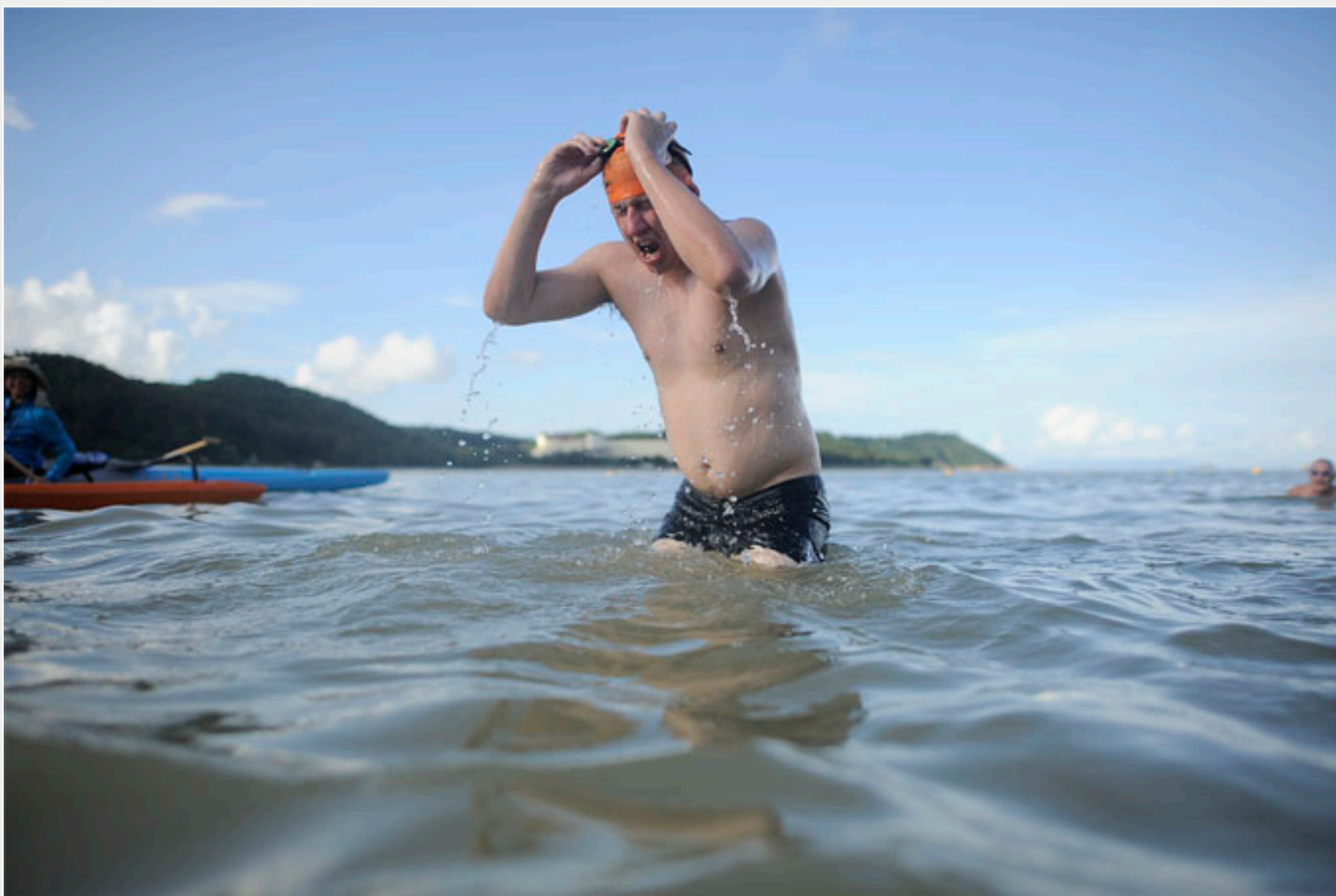


Photo: Anthony Kwan/Power of Sports Images/Ocean Recovery Alliance

On May 24, 35-year-old Simon Holliday completed the Clean Cross, an epic 35km swim from Hong Kong to Macau to raise awareness and support for marine conservation.

He was accompanied by key organiser Shu Pu – who did the journey in an outrigger canoe – and a support team from Ocean Recovery Alliance, led by Managing Director Doug Woodring.

Holliday prepared for the event by training extensively in the pool, along with five- to eight-kilometre ocean swims on weekends. His previous experience in long open-water swims around the UK and Ireland meant that Woodring was confident in Holliday’s psychological capabilities. “He has a very strong mindset, and has swum the English Channel, so he knows what pain, and even boredom, are all about. Swimming with your head down for 10 hours is a long time, and your mind goes in all directions.”

But crossing the Pearl River Estuary presented its own set of challenges, not least the prospect of sewage and industrial effluent washed down from a densely populated region home to more than 50 million people.

“We were worried about water quality due to the recent rains and runoff from the delta,” Woodring


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explained, although the water proved “remarkably good” on the day.



Photo: Anthony Kwan/Power of Sports Images/Ocean Recovery Alliance

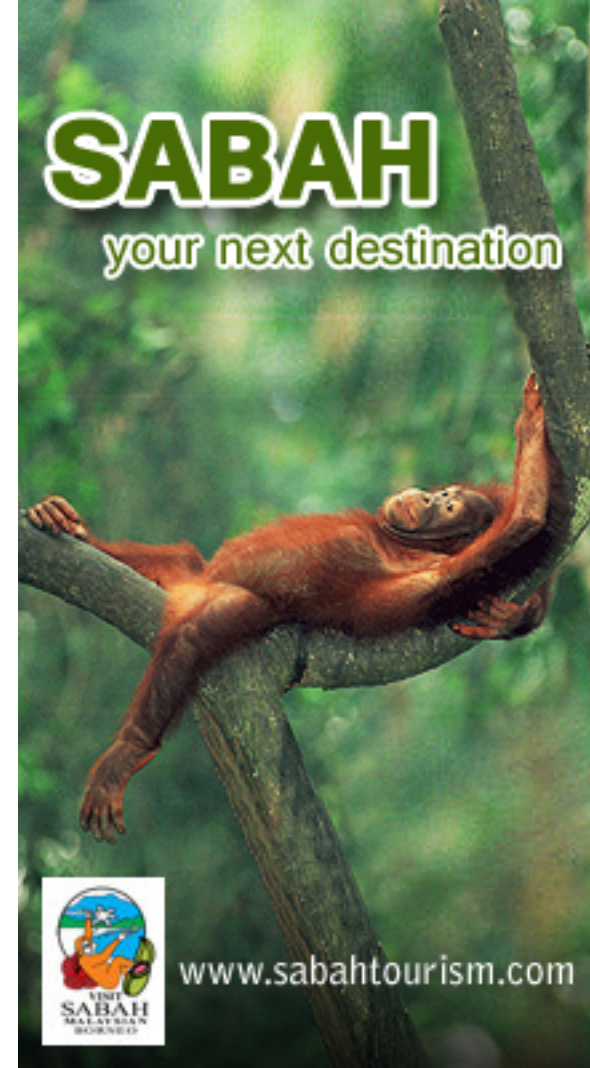
Another hazard was the volume of marine traffic, especially large oceangoing vessels and high-speed ferries between Hong Kong, Macau and nearby ports. Woodring said the ferry channel proved “not an issue at all”, but one of the most hair-raising moments involved a close encounter with two tankers before 6:00am, when the team had just started out from Lantau.

“One of them did not seem to hail to our radio calls, so greeted us with some pretty loud, long blasts. As we got in front of that one just in time, another huge one was blazing at us from the right side, going faster than any ship I had ever seen, but luckily he was on the radio and headed off course a bit so as not to turn Simon and Shu into fish-feed.”

Thankfully the rest of the journey was smooth with no safety problems. Less than three hours into the swim, in a large open area outside Hong Kong waters, the team was buoyed by the appearance of endangered pink dolphins. “We thought we might see one or two in the distance at some point, but not over 30 of them, feeding and swimming around us, for over an hour! It really was like they came to thank Simon and our team for raising awareness of ocean protection. We even saw eight of them swimming in formation, which is very rare.”



Photo: Jeffrey Yim/Ocean Recovery Alliance



But the organisers faced a final unexpected challenge just 200m from the finish line on Hac Sa Beach, where raging currents were pushing Holliday and Shu towards Macau’s airport runway. By this time Woodring was ashore, scouting out a location where Holliday could touch land without getting his hands and feet shredded by barnacles. “I had to run barefoot along the cliffs for about 150m to find an eddy in the water, and a place where the current was weak enough for Simon to swim through after 35km of swimming!”

Holliday became only the second person to swim between Hong Kong and Macau; his time of 10 hours, 20 minutes and 30 seconds came in 10 minutes ahead of the previous record set by Beijing swimmer Zhang Jian in 2005. His paddle escort Shu Pu was the first solo woman to cross the Pearl River Estuary in an outrigger canoe. **AA**



Photo: Anthony Kwan/Power of Sports Images/Ocean Recovery Alliance

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