

The Channel as Mount Everest

Pascal Vernaeve (20050094) has to have a challenging objective if he is to get himself moving. But when he does, he is capable of top performances. He is, for example, one of only twenty Dutch to have ever swum The Channel.

'When I was younger I did an awful lot of sports. Until I was eighteen, for example, I swam in competitions. In 1998 I went to study aeronautical and space engineering in Delft. I stopped doing sports from one day to the next. I was a member of the student board and was having a good time. I gained almost thirty kilos back then.

Sports? Why?

Towards the end of my studies I suddenly developed epilepsy that needed a lot of medication. I was forced to switch to the higher vocational training program aeronautical technology in Haarlem. When I was able to stop the medication I still wanted to complete a Master's. In the meantime my interest had shifted more to the commercial and social side of things instead of pure technology. And so I went for the Nyenrode Master of Science program. But even at Nyenrode I didn't do much sports. The most sporting activity was the occasional 'sloeten': leaving the kelderbar at night and wading home through the estate's canals to the campus.

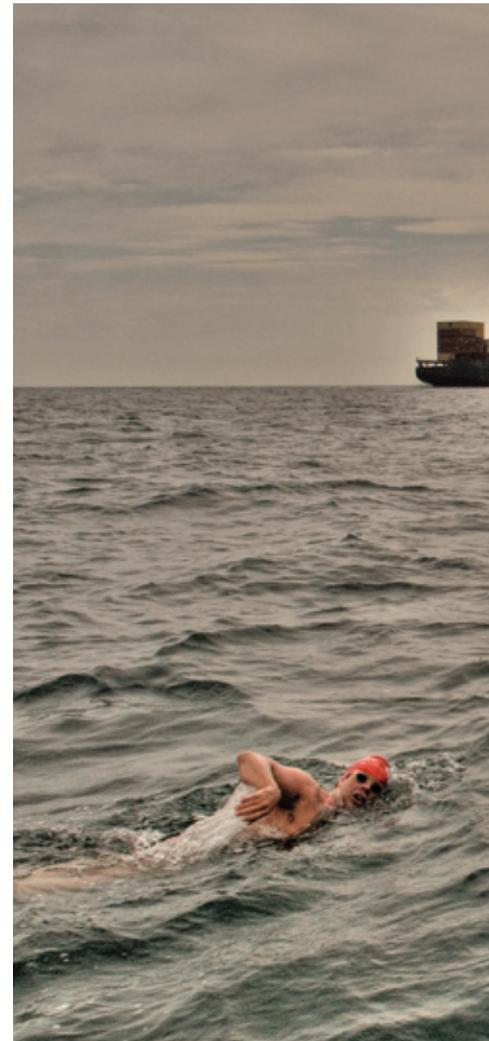
In 2008 I went to work in London at Man Group. During the Christmas party I was standing outside with a housemate with a cigarette in one hand and a pint of beer in the other. I still had my extra

30 kilos. We looked at one another and said: 'This is going wrong. We have to do something about our physical condition.' Not a day later I had entered us for the New York marathon: the best-known and most challenging in the world. We had less than nine months to train. Because we hadn't done any hill running in London the height differences in New York broke us. But we finished it, and my time was 4.5 hours. But I will never run another marathon.

The highest objective

While I was training for the marathon my father, a sixty-year-old man, had a heart attack despite being a model for a healthy and fit lifestyle. Fortunately he recovered completely. His heart attack was a wake-up call for me though: I have to make sure I keep fit physically. But I knew of myself that I don't do sports unless there's significantly challenging objective. So when a friend of mine asked me to climb Kilimanjaro together I didn't hesitate for long. It was a fantastic trip I would recommend to anyone. Then I had the idea of swimming The Channel. For swimmers it's the same as climbing Mount Everest for mountaineers. Nowadays you can only do it from England to France. You have to join one of two clubs that are specifically there for this purpose. They look after the administration and documentation before and during the crossing. You have to organize a boat to accompany you yourself as well as a medical check and a declaration that you've spent at least six hours in water of 15 degrees Celsius or less. You're not allowed to wear any thermal swimming gear. You have to walk into the water at the beach in Dover, dry, wearing just a swimming costume and a bathing hat. You can cover yourself in fat.

Free time is getting ever-scarcer, and therefore more valuable. What do Nyenrodeans do in their time off? A focus on alumni with a fun, strange or exciting, but especially remarkable way of spending their free hours. Know someone who belongs in this column? Then send a mail to vcvalumni@nyenrode.nl.





Seeking out the cold

You can only cross The Channel between early July and the end of August as the days are longer and the water's not so cold. As the crow flies it's a distance of 33 kilometers but because of the strong currents you can't swim to France in a straight line. I expected it to take between 12 and 14 hours. I started training in October 2010. I did laps in a swimming pool in London and went to the gym a couple of times a week. As of April I was able to do longer laps in the natural pool in Hyde Park. To get my body used to the cold I had a cold shower every day from February. For the last two months I also did so at work. I made sure I was always cold and slept on top of the blankets. I wondered every now and then what I was doing but I had told everyone and felt I couldn't back out. I didn't train as hard in the last two weeks and tried to eat a lot. You need extra fat as insulation against the cold and as fuel.

I had a 'slot' from 7 to 11 July. Five Nyenrode friends were going to encourage me and join me on the accompanying boat. But because of the bad weather the departure was repeatedly postponed. In the end I didn't get to leave until 10 July and only my girlfriend **Floortje van Haaren (20060050)** was on the boat. I would never have made it without her though. She gave me tremendous support and assistance during the preparation and especially during the crossing. At five-thirty we left Folkstone for Dover.

After six hours' swimming I had had it. 'Luckily' I hit a jellyfish that stung me quite badly in my neck, shoulders and side. It helped though because a serious dose of adrenaline and anger helped me forwards. Because of the huge currents I ended up swimming 50 kilometers instead of 33. When I arrived in France after 13 hours and 25 minutes my parents, family and friends were waiting for me on the beach. It was a really emotional moment. My father was proud and honored and my mother was happy it had all ended well. The worry had kept her from sleeping for three nights.

The good cause

In the UK people had introduced me to the idea of collecting money for the effort – that's far more common there. Through friends, colleagues and acquaintances I collected EUR12,500 for the Heart Foundation. My boss, **Tjalling Halbertsma (19890052)**, a fanatical sportsman and adventurer himself, also supported and helped me by combining many hours of training with work.

I had a fantastic time at Nyenrode. As a science student the program's content was really enriching. I also learnt how to deal with pressure and met my best friends. I met Floortje, my girlfriend, later in London. And I think I gained the will to make such an effort in completing my objectives.'

For more information:

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React?

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