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## No 33. February 2018

Dear swimmers and others

Welcome to the February 2018 edition of the Otter Aquatics newsletter. I trust you had a relaxing festive season – hopefully in the water – and are now back ready to put all your new year's resolutions about fitness and swimming into practice.

Look inside to find:

-  Training Aids: An Assessment .....p1
-  The joy of Open Water Swimming (OWS).....p3
-  Stroke tip of the month: 'sighting' in OWS .....p3
-  Safe OWSing at Queens Beach North, Scarborough: our 'rules'.. p4
-  Heat exhaustion and heat stroke.....p5
-  Beware of Stonefish .....p7
-  Beware of Rips.....p8
-  A new distance world record .....p9
-  Australian and international swimming holidays.....p10
-  New Year's Resolutions.....p11
-  And our quiz, quote and pic of the month .....pp11 and 12.

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### Training aids: an assessment

There are many swimming training aids on the market so you might be baffled by the choice, when you should use them or even if you need to use them. Just like electronic gadgets, some of these aids may be useful to develop your swimming technique and performance but, in my opinion, most are just an over-commercialisation of what should be an almost costless activity

and are unlikely to be particularly useful. So here is a brief list together with my assessment of their value.

### *Fins*

Fins increase the surface area of the foot, so they can work to strengthen the leg muscles, increase heart rate and improve kicking technique. They can also be used for specialised drills where greater body stability is desired. Of course they add speed to your normal stroke but isn't that just giving you an unfair advantage? There are very many types of fins, but they all perform much the same function. Find a pair that is comfortable and stick with it. Fins are like ice cream: they feel good at the time but too much can cause develop a dependency. So use them for a specific purpose then discard them for normal swimming. Don't use them as a substitute for developing an effective kick.

### *Kickboards*

For beginners lacking in confidence, especially in their ability to float, these may be useful as they provide a type of security blanket. Otherwise, forget them. They give artificial buoyancy in the upper body giving a 'heads-up' position in kicking practice (and therefore a hips and legs down position) as well as preventing body rotation. Kicking practice on the front should preferably be done without a kickboard and preferably with one arm extended and breathing to the other side. Similarly kicking practice on the back should be done with both arms extended and without a kickboard.

### *Pull buoys*

Pull buoys are valuable to enable the swimmer to concentrate on upper body action and to ignore leg movement. They are also useful to train the mind in developing a flat (i.e. horizontal) body profile. But, as with fins, they should be put aside after the drill so the swimmer can replicate this body position with the legs alone. Remember, if you use a pull buoy, do not try to kick as such a kick will come from the knees and not the hips as they should to be effective.

### *Paddles*

Paddles perform two useful but limited functions: they build strength in the upper body and arms and they help to develop good technique in the entry and pull/push phases of the stroke. But there is a serious problem with using them – unless you have developed a good catch, using them is likely to result in a shoulder injury as they exert an unnatural upwards force on the arm and shoulder in the extension without providing any forward propulsion or developing strength. So use them sparingly and with care. There are a lot of types and styles of paddles on the market; personally I prefer the 'Finis' ones with a single thumb hole. To use them you need to have light tension in the fingers and palm of the hand just to keep them on and that gives a good feel for the water. Finger paddles also develop a good feel for the water. A tip for 'normal' paddles: try using them with just the middle finger inserted in the strapping.

### *Snorkels*

Centreline and other snorkels may be useful in some limited circumstances, such as when the swimmer is doing sculling drills, but pretty useless elsewhere. Manufacturers claim that they promote a good body rotation but I have found that they actively inhibit rotation. Of course, they may be useful if the swimmer is physically unable to rotate or turn the head to breathe.

### *Other stuff*

And then there are other bits and pieces like buoyancy shorts and ankle straps. There are even drag suits (no, not the one you wear on a Saturday night in the Valley). In any case, our tried and true milk crate and bungy cord do better jobs for resistance training.

So, while some 'toys' may have some limited use, all you really need to participate in our wondrous sport/form of exercise are a pair of goggles and a pair of togs (and not even those if you want).

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## The joy of Open Water Swimming (OWS)

Swimming without the restrictions of lane ropes, without having to turn every 25 or 50 metres or so (the 'tyranny of the wall') and without chemicals or other peoples' body secretions is what *real* swimming is all about. We rarely feel such abandonment in a pool, but we can and do feel it swimming in the open water which can be a lake, a river or, especially, the sea.

All swimming is freedom. There is a sense of freedom and peace about being immersed, indeed supported, even embraced, in water. To be tossed and caressed by the waves and to breathe the salty tang of the water is to be alive. To swim in the sea is exhilaration close to its peak.

Have you ever considered that long-distance open water swimming is really a form of meditation? You will finish your swim totally relaxed – OWSers often say that they leave all their cares and worries in the water. Once you make the transition, you will see that this is real swimming and that pool swims are just training for the real thing.

There are few differences between the types of swimming that you do in the pool compared to the open water. Apart from sighting (see below) about the only one is whether you should revert to two-stroke breathing from time-to-time to avoid taking in a mouthful of wave.

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## Stroke tip of the month: 'Sighting' in OWS

One of the major points of difference between open water swimming and pool swimming is the lack of a black line to follow. Indeed, not having to follow a line is one of the great joys of OWS. So, in the absence of that black line, what do we OWSers do to swim straight?

The first answer is that our stroke should be as symmetrical as possible; and the best way to achieve this is by bilateral (aka alternate breathing or 3-stroke) breathing. The second point is, fundamentally, that we have to think and be conscious of our surroundings and what is going on around us, which we might call 'mindfulness'. Part of being aware of our surroundings is that we need to occasionally lift our eyes above the surface to check that our destination, or an intermediary point, is still where we want it to be and, if we are not on track, to make any necessary course corrections to get us back. This is called 'sighting' and the point we are aiming for is called the 'sighting point'.

How do we sight? Some swimming theorists believe that an OWSer needs to lift their head immediately after an inhalation; others believe that the head lift should occur just before the inhalation. In my experience, it doesn't make any difference; either is ok. Swimming beginners

learn that we should not lift the head as that causes the hips and legs to drop. That is true but we must do it in the open water in order to swim straight. We would otherwise be inclined to cover a much greater distance than we need to and, in a race, this can make all the difference between doing a good time and not. Even in just a casual swim, we probably don't want to zig-zag all over the place. In order to keep the drag of our body caused by this necessary occasional head lift to a minimum, the less we lift our head the better. But this depends on the conditions. In rough water, we may have to sight every five or ten strokes; in calm water, perhaps every 20 or even 50 strokes. It's all a matter of trial and error.

We should lift the head briefly and only so that the eyes/goggles are out of the water. And we should not let sighting interfere with our stroke rate/cadence. In rough conditions, we should sight on the top of a wave's crest to give us the best chance of seeing our intermediate or end sighting point. In a long swim, we are unlikely to see our end point, so we should sight either on intermediate points or, if there are none, we should sight on something far in the distance such as a headland, a large tree or a tall building and then refine our sighting points as we get closer.

There will be some locations where there is no sighting point at all, such as along a convex or flat shoreline. You may be able to sight on an accompanying boat or paddler; if there are none, just do the best you can which is likely to be trying to maintain an equal distance off the shore.

In a competitive open water event, you will likely only need to sight if you are out in front of the pack or out to one side or the other. If you are in the pack, you almost certainly will not be able to see any sighting point at all, so just follow the splash of the person in front of you and hope that they are on track.

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## Safe OWSing at Queens Beach North, Scarborough: our 'non-rules'


As our numbers at Queens Beach North have increased over recent weeks, it is timely to re-state a few of our 'non-rules'.


The first one is that there are no rules. That is because our swims are not organised as such which is just the way we like it. We are just a group of like minded people swimming in our natural environment. It might seem that I am the organiser but that's not the case. I am not even the first of our number to do it – that honour belongs to John 'the patient' Dixon who another person once described as 'an old bloke swimming up and down the beach'. Then that same person announced a little later 'now there are two old blokes swimming up and down'; the second one was me. And it has grown ever since.


So while we are just a collection of friends who want the freedom of swimming in the open water we must always be mindful of our own safety and that of other swimmers; hence our 'non-rules'. Queens (and any other beach we may swim at) is a public beach and everyone is entitled to be on the beach or in the water. So these 'rules' are just recommendations for us to follow to stay safe.

**Neither Otter Aquatics nor I have any legal or other duty of care for swimmers.** We do not have any water safety staff or vessels and it is almost impossible to see a head from water level if we drift apart, especially in rough conditions. Therefore our safety is our own individual responsibility and we must all be on the lookout for ourselves as well as our fellow swimmers at all times. So here are the 'non-rules':

 Swim in a group. We don't want anyone to get into trouble in the water so we should all keep an eye out for each other. The only way to do that effectively is to swim in a group or groups and to occasionally look around for the others. Groups of swimmers are less attractive to sharks but there are other dangers out there which any of us may encounter such as stingers, kayakers and other boaters including the dreaded jet skiers who are going so fast and are so absorbed in their own importance that they cannot see anyone else. Also, if any of us succumbs to a health condition (such as heart attack, diabetic 'event', panic attack or even cramp), we need to get the victim to shore as quickly as possible. So do stay in your group which means swimming at the pace of the group's slowest swimmer

 Related to swimming in a group, if you are not skilled at 'sighting', swim alongside someone who is. Not only does it keep all of us safer, we will all swim together and in a straight(er) line

 Wear an easy-to-see swimming cap. Fluro yellow and fluro orange are the easiest to see

 We should not swim for a day or two after heavy rain as storm water drains into the sea where we swim and it contains all sorts of nasty contaminants, possibly sewerage overflow and even the occasional dead animal. All of these may cause us to get sick and they may also attract sharks

 **Sharks.** To lessen the risk of attracting sharks, we should obey the following:

- We should not swim in the early morning or early evening as those times are preferred feeding times for sharks
- We should avoid swimming where schools of fish are feeding. Small fish attract big fish
- We should avoid swimming near fishers as their activity may attract sharks (and we also don't want to get hooked or bother the fishers)
- We should not swim with dogs as their more rapid movements may attract sharks
- We should avoid swimming near dead animals in the water such as turtles, fish or birds.

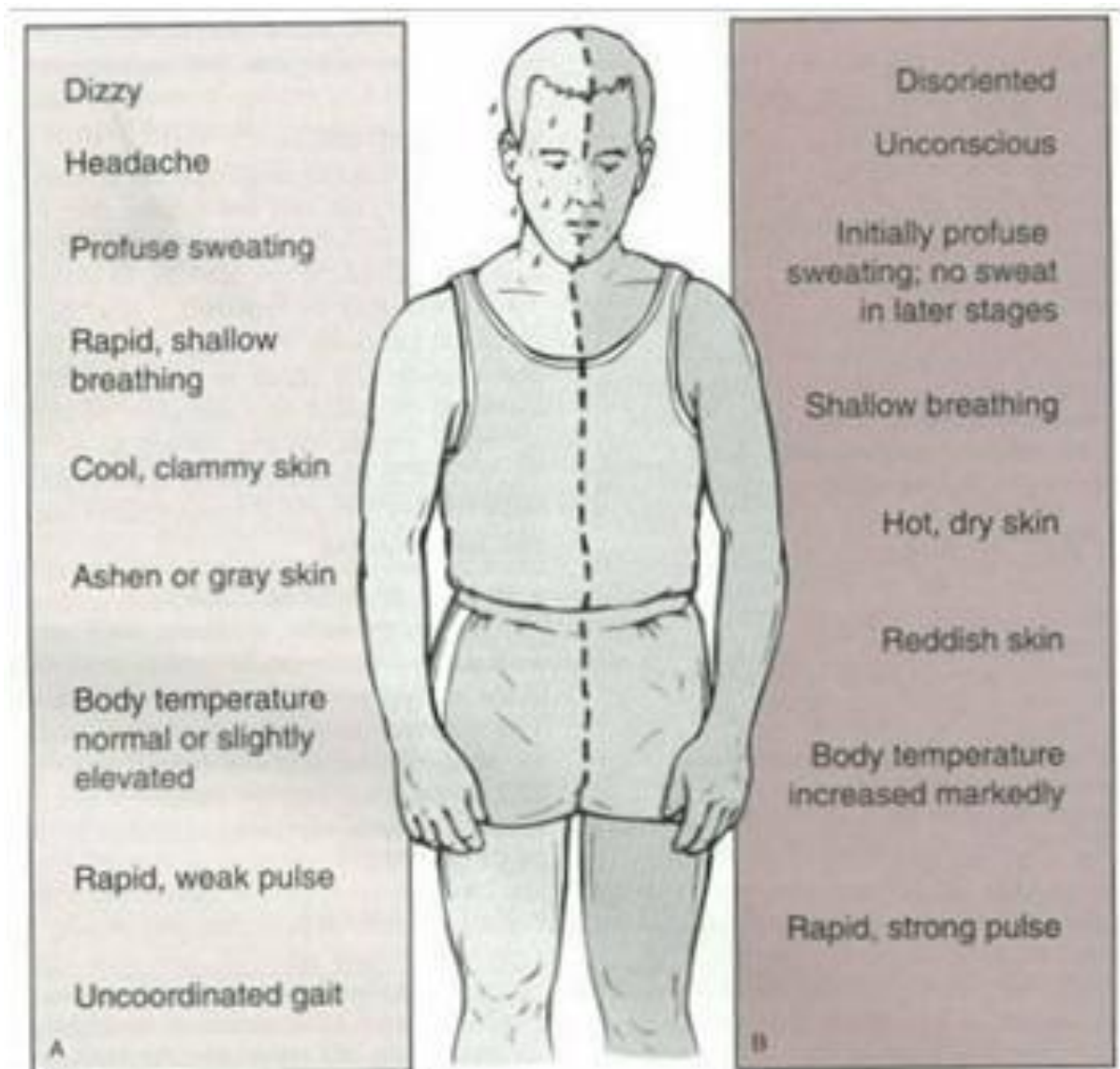
That all sounds like a lot of don'ts. But the rest of it is all good. So get out there and enjoy the freedom of the open water while staying safe.

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## Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke

As those of us who live in Queensland know only too well, we are in the middle of a sweltering summer – and there is at least a month to go! So how do we stay healthy and safe exercising (or gardening) on hot and humid days?

Check out the following list of symptoms. The left column describes *heat exhaustion* and the right column *heat stroke*.



*Why does it happen?*

*Heat exhaustion:* the body's normal cooling mechanisms are not working adequately. Blood volume is decreased due to excessive sweating resulting in a decrease of circulation to the vital organs leading to shock.

*Heat stroke:* can occur if exposure to the heat source continues. Organs such as the brain, heart and kidneys can fail quickly leading to irreversible neurological damage or death.

*What should you do?*

*Heat exhaustion:* lay the patient down, remove from the hot environment, provide sips of cool fluids (not cold), cool the body, seek medical advice if necessary.

*Heat stroke:* As for heat exhaustion plus cool the body rapidly by wetting and fanning and with ice/cold packs under armpits, in the groin and around the neck **This is a medical emergency and an ambulance should be called on 000 without delay.**

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## Beware of stonefish



One of the many types of stonefish found in our waters

There have been recent reports of an influx of stonefish into Moreton Bay waters. It could be that there are more stonefish about or that there are more people in the water these days, either or both are likely to result in greater swimmer-stonefish interaction. These critters should not be taken for granted and they can deliver an excruciatingly painful sting which, in extreme circumstances, can lead to death.

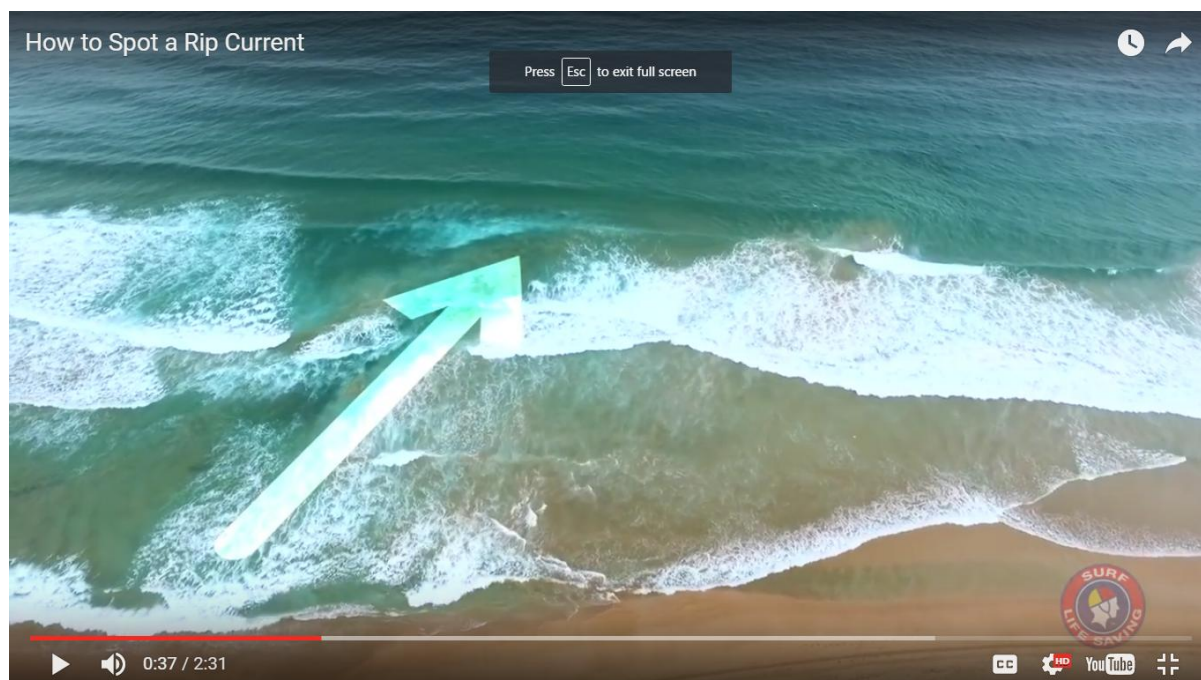
Stonefish look like stones or rocks, hence the name. They deliver their venom through a spike on their spine, but they will only do so if they feel threatened, such as by a person standing on them. The best thing to do is to avoid standing on or kicking rocks – or things that look like rocks – which is a frequent hazard on Redcliffe peninsula beaches, especially at low tide. If you are entering the water at low tide, avoid coming into contact with them by getting horizontal as soon as possible. In other words, float as soon as you can. Some people wear aqua shoes but these are unlikely to have a tough enough sole to guard against a stonefish barb.

If you do manage to stand on one of the buggers, the first aid treatment is to immerse the affected part of the body (usually a foot) in water as hot as you can bear until the pain subsides. The science behind this is little understood but it appears that the hot water denatures the protein in the venom and stops it spreading around the body. It does relieve the pain but does nothing to neutralise the venom in the long term, so you still need to go to a hospital to receive antivenene. Of course, if there is no hot water to hand, just get to hospital as quickly as you can.

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## Beware of rips



Fifty people drowned on Australian beaches in the last year, making a worrying four per cent increase on the ten year average. **All these deaths occurred outside of patrolled areas** and were often as a result of being caught in a rip which itself is a result of an inability to recognise and deal with rips.

### *What are rips?*

Rips are just the way that water coming into the beach in broken waves finds its way back out to sea. A rip won't pull you under and it won't take you to New Zealand. Indeed it will dissipate when it gets beyond the breaking waves (the surf zone), normally no more than a hundred metres or so offshore. In some cases (but not all), a rip may even turn around and bring you back to shore through the breaking waves.

### *How to recognise a rip.*

Don't be tempted to enter the sea where the waves are calmer compared to surrounding water as this is likely to be where a rip is. Another method of recognising a rip is to observe the movement of discoloured water, froth or floating debris out to sea.

### *Where should you swim?*

You should always swim between the red and yellow flags and obey the directions of lifesavers and lifeguards. They place the flags away from rips. There has not been a drowning in patrolled areas at Australian beaches for over 85 years!

Lifesavers and lifeguards often use the mantra: 'If you do not swim between the flags and you cannot recognise a rip, chances are that you will be caught in one'.



*What do you do if you get caught in a rip?*

- 🧐 Go with it, float on your back, conserve energy and put up your hand to attract attention. Once beyond the surf zone and the rip has dissipated, swim parallel to the beach and then come back to shore through breaking waves
- 🧐 Only if you are a strong swimmer and the rip is weak should you consider **swimming parallel to the beach and at right angles to the rip**, towards an area where the waves are breaking
- 🧐 Never swim against the rip, even if you are a strong swimmer and even if it is a weak rip. It will exhaust you
- 🧐 Relax and stay calm. **Rips don't kill but panic does.**

Some ocean swimming events deliberately start in a rip in order to get swimmers 'out the back' as quickly as possible. Also lifesavers involved in a rescue and board riders will often swim out in a rip for the same reason.

For more information, go to: <https://beachsafe.org.au/surf-safety/ripcurrents>

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## A new distance world record

On 8.30am on 8 August 2017, American marathon swimmer Sarah Thomas began a non-stop long distance record attempt in Lake Champlain, New York. She finished almost three days later having set a new record at 104.6 miles (168.3 kilometres). Frequent readers of this epistle will immediately want to compare Sarah's feat with the previous record set by our own Chloë McCardel who swam 124.4km in 41.5 hours in 2014.

Sarah had many high and low points in her swim as well as hallucinations (one of which was seeing Christmas elves on the back of her support boat!). She also contemplated taking a nap while her face was in the water until she realised that this was probably not a good idea. The most severe after effect of her feat was becoming unconscious and not breathing in the bath in her hotel room after the swim. The quick thinking of her husband and an accompanying paramedic got her out in time and she was resuscitated. Apart from that, she reported a little chafing and a sore throat from the salt water but that's all.



**Sarah Thomas after her record-breaking swim**

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## Australian and international swimming holidays

The following Australian and European swimming holidays are on offer for 2019:

### 'The Iconic and Historic Swimming Places of Sydney' Swimtour

This will be held every March and November if there are sufficient numbers. [Click here](#) for information on our November 2017 trip.

### International Swimming Holidays

Our next European swimming holidays will be in August/September 2019. There will be five offerings:

**Italy's Lake Orta.** This, our flagship tour. It will be similar to our 2017 trip. See <http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/orta.html>

**Cycling and Swimming Tour of Lake Constance.** This will also be similar to our 2017 trip. See: <http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/constance.html>

**Symi Island, Greece.** See: <http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/greece.html> for details of the trip that was planned for 2018

Plus two exciting ones we haven't done before:

**A Baltic swimming challenge.** This would involve a few days of gentle lake swimming in and around Helsinki in Finland to get over our jetlag and to get acclimatised. Then we will fly or go by ferry to either Lithuania or Latvia for a week of lake swimming. Then it would be a train trip through Estonia, a ferry back to Helsinki and then by train north to a lake within Finland's Arctic Circle for a week of 'very special' swimming. Hey, it will be in the northern summer and the water will be warm, ok? What is warm? About 16 degrees. Wetsuits optional.

**Swimming the Straits of Gibraltar.** This will be a 16k relay for teams of four in multiples of 30 minute swim legs – so about four 30 minute legs of one kilometre each. When not swimming, we will be resting up in the support boat and providing support for the person swimming. This would require about three weeks of staying in Spain in early to mid September to allow for participation in the training program, selection in a group and to allow for alternative crossing dates in case of bad weather. The water temp would likely be between 18 and 20 degrees.

All of these trips will go ahead only if there are sufficient numbers; say about 6 per event. The deadline for registration and payment of a deposit for each swimming holiday is **31<sup>st</sup> December 2018**, but get in touch with me much sooner if you are even a bit interested. More details including prices will be available in the next few months.

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## New Year's resolutions

'What is your new year's swimming resolution'? Tell me what they are and I will publish the best three in next month's newsletter – and then maybe follow up in six months – all of this just to keep you to your plan.

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## Quiz of the month

The answers to *last month's* two part question are as follows:

In her day, Australian swimmer Sarah Frances "Fanny" Durack (1889 – 1956) was the world's greatest female swimmer over all distances. She won the gold medal and established the world record in the 100 metre freestyle at the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm becoming the first Australian woman to win an Olympic gold medal in a swimming event.

*Question 1:* Where did Fanny learn to swim? **Answer:** She taught herself to swim at McIver's Baths (aka Ladies Baths or the Nun's Baths) at Coogee.

*Question 2:* Who was Fanny's best friend, training partner, greatest rival and silver medallist in Stockholm? For a bonus, where did she learn to swim? **Answer:** Wilhelmina (Mina) Wylie who learned to swim at Bronte Baths which was then under the management of her father, former champion swimmer Henry Alexander Wylie. Both Fanny and Mina trained for Stockholm at Wylie's Baths in Coogee.

There were two joint winners: **Vincent Mar** joined our usual winner **Marieta Hanaghan**. They will get their prizes as soon as I make them.

*This month's quiz question is: 'how can you tell the difference between **heat exhaustion** and **heat stroke**'*

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## Quotes of the month: two of them again this month

*'You don't stop swimming because you get old. You get old because you stop swimming'*

*'If you don't look after your body, where are you going to live?'*

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## Pic of the month



Some of our ten OWSers at Queens on 13 January

