

Press release

Marburg, 2 March 2023

Extreme swimmer braves the forces of nature

Nathalie Pohl is the first German woman to cross New Zealand's Cook Strait

It seems as if neither a cyclone nor an earthquake can stop her and her ambition is limitless: In her third attempt, extreme swimmer Nathalie Pohl has successfully managed to cross New Zealand's Cook Strait as the first German woman and the fastest European woman to do so. With an exceptional time of 06:33:00 hours, the 28-year-old reached the finish line on Ohau Bay at 4.30 p. m. local time (UTC+13) on 1 March.

A very hazardous channel

The passage between Ohau Bay on New Zealand's North Island and Arapawa Island on its South Island is considered particularly dangerous. Only 130 extreme swimmers worldwide have ever successfully made the crossing. In addition to being a busy shipping lane, there are often sharks to contend with and significant seismic shifts on the seabed, which can cause dangerous currents. The Cook Strait is also known for its rough seas. Strong currents can add many hours to the swim. As Nathalie Pohl has experienced twice before, New Zealand's forces of nature are something to be reckoned with. She had to abort her attempts in 2019 and 2020 after struggling against the current for hours, sometimes even swimming "backwards".

Crossing was on the back burner due to floods, cyclone and earthquake

The motivation was all the greater this year. But the extreme swimmer had to worry about the crossing for a long time. Extensive rainfall caused flooding in New Zealand. Then cyclone Gabrielle and an earthquake made the start almost impossible. For more than three weeks, Nathalie Pohl waited for better weather. Meanwhile, she continued to train in a disciplined manner, but the uncertainty was not an easy situation, especially mentally. "New Zealand did not make it easy for me. It wasn't sure until the end whether I would be able to compete at all. Staying focused over such a long period of time was a real challenge. Even during the swim, the conditions were far from ideal. The weather suddenly changed again. I am just happy that I made it after all," explains the 28-year-old. But she didn't allow herself to be daunted. After all, Nathalie Pohl is characterised in particular by her iron will. "In open-water swimming, the most important thing is your mental strength. No matter how well you have prepared, there will always be a residual risk. Mastering such a challenge with nothing but the strength of your own body results in such an adrenaline rush for me," she says.

Intensive preparations are the key

Her success was preceded by months of preparations. To get ready for the crossings, Nathalie Pohl completed extremely intensive training that went far beyond just the swimming itself. In addition to hundreds of hours in the water, she also engaged in special

strength training and exercises to prepare her for the cold and darkness. Her trainer Joshua Neuloh explains: “In December, we prepared for the Cook Strait in Portugal. We were in the Atlantic, facing two-metre waves, a water temperature of 16 degrees and bad storms. There were no boats out. Even the Portuguese navy had kept its fleet in port. But Nathalie was out there, training hard.” Finally, food is a major topic. In the water, Nathalie has to eat every 30 minutes due to the enormous exertion. With such high waves as those she experienced in New Zealand, even just being able to eat something is a major challenge.

Within reach: The first German woman to complete the “Ocean’s Seven”

Nathalie has once again shown that all these deprivations and years of training have paid off. The Cook Strait crossing marks Nathalie’s successful completion of the sixth of seven stages on her way to attaining the “Ocean’s Seven” – the world’s toughest long-distance open-water swimming challenge. The seventh stage in the icy North Channel between Ireland and Scotland is planned for September. If it all goes to plan, Nathalie Pohl can crown herself Queen of the Seas. She would be the 23rd person in the world, as well as the first German woman and youngest swimmer, to complete this challenge.

More information available at: www.nathaliepohl.de



Nathalie Pohl in open seas during her crossing of the Cook Strait (photo: Mark Tantrum)



NATHALIE POHL



Nathalie Pohl in open seas during her crossing of the Cook Strait (photo: Mark Tantrum)

About the Cook Strait:

- The Cook Strait separates New Zealand's North and South Islands
- It was named after the British captain, explorer and seafarer James Cook
- It is 26 kilometres wide (although the distance swum is always longer due to the currents)
- Some specific challenges for extreme swimmers include strong currents, storms and sharks
- There are only around ten attempts to cross it every year
- The water temperature is a mere 15 to 18 degrees
- To date, 130 swimmers have completed the crossing
- It is one of the seven stages in the "Ocean's Seven"
- Side note: The "Ocean's Seven" involves swimming across seven sea channels on five different continents. It is important that the athlete starts and finishes on land and does not touch the support boat or wear a neoprene wetsuit. Only 22 swimmers in the world have achieved this feat. Nathalie Pohl would be the first German woman to do so

Contact:

www.nathaliepohl.de / info@nathaliepohl.de