

# SWIMRUN

*a sporting adventure  
in a magical setting*

**A guide for beginners  
and the curious**

The story

The right equipment

Preparing for a race

Interview



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# Introduction



Swimrun is booming! More and more endurance athletes are taking part in this sporting adventure that is so much more than just „triathlon without the cycling“. Almost every day we hear of new races - whether in urban areas or somewhere in the middle of nature. The sports industry has been quick to pick up on this trend and is developing on special products that make races even faster.

This e-book gives an overview of the different Swimrun topics including: Where did the Swimrun idea originate from; What kind of equipment is used; How to train for Swimrun; What competitions are available and where to find these events.

Enjoy reading and perhaps we'll see you at a Swimrun event soon!





## ***How it all began: The Swimrun story***

Back in 2002, brothers Mats and Jesper Andersson, Anders Malm and Janne Lindberg spent a beer-fuelled evening on the small island called Utö in the Stockholm archipelago. Whilst recalling various tales of adventure with the help of a map of the region roughly sketched on a napkin, it occurred to the group that the beautiful coastal scenery of the area still remained a relatively undiscovered gem. Why not make something of it? That night, the idea for Swimrun was born....

The challenge the group set themselves involved a race incorporate running and swimming from the island of Utö to the island of Sandhamn. Split into two teams, the brothers and two friends decided to make things interesting: it was decided the losing team pick up the cost of dinner, drinks and an overnight stay on Sandhamn. Sufficiently motivated, the teams set off on their race. After 26 hours, the first team had finally reached the destination. The race proved so fun that they decided immediately that a repeat the following year was in order.

It was in 2005 that a certain Michael Lemmel got wind of the challenge. As an avid "Adventure Racer" and owner of a small agency for sports marketing, he found the concept interesting and intriguing. He couldn't believe that such a route through the archipelago could actually be handled continuously. Both Lemmel and his friend and business partner Mats Skott had been looking to start their own racing series and were keen to give this new idea a go.

Shortly after, an initial meeting with the inventors of the challenge was scheduled. Much was discussed: How would the race work around boat traffic? Could a race be developed that would last a day? How could the route be plotted so that it would remain faithful to the original idea yet be both practical and safe?

A name for the project was found: "ÖTILLÖ" (Swedish for "island hopping") and plans for a test-run came to fruition in June 2006. A group consisting of Mats Skott, his wife Natasha, Michael Lemmel and the victorious brothers Mats and Jesper Andersson took the route through the Stockholm archipelago early one morning. The rehearsal proved a success and it was agreed that a proper competition should be held the following September.

*Mats Skott*

*Michael Lemmel*



Of the nine adventurous two-person teams to take place in the first ÖTILLÖ, only two finished. The winners, adventure racing champions from Finland, benefitted from air mattresses (in the form of Nokia phones) which helped them quickly navigate the islands. As a result, the use of flotation devices for future events was revised and the carrying of air mattresses was prohibited. Nevertheless, the event was a success as the media picked up on the idea and covered the crazy swimming and running adventure enthusiastically.

The media coverage soon caught the attention of endurance athletes which prompted Michael and Mats to repeat the race in the following years with more and more participants. Other events which incorporated other Swedish organisers were added and it eventual-

ly became clear that Swimrun wasn't going away any time soon.

There are now hundreds of Swimrun races taking place far beyond the borders of its original home in Scandinavia. Athletes no longer see Swimrun as a little fun for the off-season, but seek out the finest equipment and train specifically for the season.

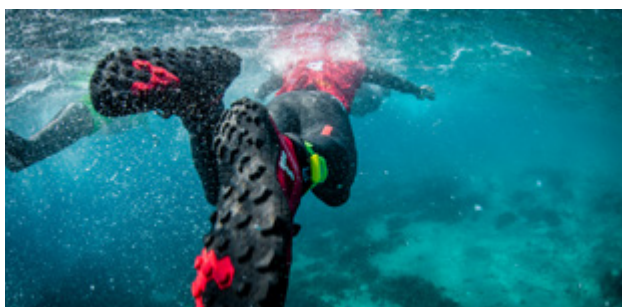
# ***What exactly is Swimrun? What makes the sport so special?***

Swimrun is so much more than just swimming and running. After all, unlike the triathlon or Aquathlon each discipline is only completed once but several times.

A fundamental feature of Swimrun is that athletes carry their equipment for both disciplines with them throughout the race. In order to save time, many choose to keep their wetsuit and shoes on throughout to save valuable time. Others choose to swap equipment – it all depends on preference.

Swimrun is often closely linked with nature. Many races take place through stunning landscapes and even training can turn into a mini-adventure. Swimrun is all about freedom to explore the outdoors – pounding a cross-country trail can immediately turn into a swim across a glistening lake.

There's also another important feature of Swimrun that makes it special: Swimrun is an endurance sport that you do as part of a team. From the training up until the race, Swimrun is a rewarding team experience. Teams support and motivate each other to push themselves to success. The connections you make are incredibly strong and often lead to lasting friendships.





# ***What do you need to have in order to take part in Swimrun?***

To take part in a Swimrun, you don't need expensive equipment or a daily training schedule. However, you do need a good level of endurance. Training sessions can be easily integrated into everyday life. Everyone can spare the time during the week for a morning swim or a jog during a lunch break. Swimrun training can be worked out families and jobs with ease. Even if your training is confined to weekends, it's still enough to prepare you for a race.

Swimrun equipment doesn't have to be special – existing sports shoes and swimming equipment can be used or bought easily. For those wishing to upgrade, specialised Swimrun equipment is available to buy. But initially, it is very easy to try out!

Adventure plays a very important role. Since Swimrun usually takes place in nature, interacting with the elements shouldn't daunt you. Wind, waves and lush vegetation make the sport a unique experience. Team partners ensure mutual security, support and motivation throughout the course of the race.

Swimrun also involves problem management. Throughout the course of a race unforeseen things can happen. Equipment can become faulty or the route can change. In such moments you need a cool head and a degree of flexibility. It is these little surprises that many consider to be the **“icing on the cake”** of the Swimrun adventure.





## ***The right equipment for Swimrun***

When it comes to getting the right equipment for a Swimrun race, several things should be considered. What can you bring to the race to make it easier and faster to get to the finish? What equipment does the organiser provide or require me to bring? All these questions and more will be answered now!

Before we give away any equipment tips, remember it's important to select the right team partner! Even the best equipment on the market won't help if you haven't got the right partner! To begin with, define with your partner what you want from the race and offer support and encouragement throughout. In the race, there will also be moments when you have to wait for your other partner and it's important to support each other during these moments. As corny as it may sound:

**»Only TOGETHER  
are we STRONG!«**



# The Equipment:

## The wetsuit



**HEAD**

**HEAD**  
*ÖTILLÖ Swimrun Rough Triathlon Clothing*

Swimrun races that take place in the summer often mean it is possible to participate without using a wet suit. In colder temperatures and on courses that feature long swimming sections, wearing a wetsuit is recommended. Not only do they provide protection against the cold but also help promote speedier movement through the water.

So as not to lose time constantly changing in and out of your wetsuit during a Swimrun race, many choose to keep it on. To avoid chafing at the elbows and knees, it is advised to trim your wetsuit accordingly. The leg sections on a wetsuit handily provide support and protection whilst running through undergrowth.

Several sports manufacturers have created wetsuits that are specially designed for the Swimrunner. Specially designed materials are used to suit both swimming and running. In addition, they offer special features including zips on the front and back that allow users to quickly the wetsuit on and off, inner pockets for small equipment or energy gels, integrated safety equipment and much more.

It is advised that users extensively test the wetsuit before a long training mission or the first race. It is especially important to check the step, the shoulders and armpits to ensure the suit fits perfectly and is flexible enough for both swimming and running. Ensure you do not feel you constrained in the suit and that you can breathe freely. Pay attention to the quality of the zip because you will use it often. If everything is up to scratch, you have found your ideal Swimrun wetsuit.

A good selection of quality  
Swimrun wetsuits can be  
found on addnature at:

**addnature Swimrun**



## Running shoes

There are no right or wrong decisions when choosing running shoes. Simply find shoes that fit your style of running. Of course, lightweight shoes with comfortable soles are important. Additionally, shoes made of water resistant material are highly beneficial. Just like the wetsuit, unless there is a prolonged period of swimming the shoes often remain on throughout the race.

Shoes should be tested prior to racing because every foot is different. In addition, it is important to check if the shoes match the race course: will you be running through countryside or on roads and paths?

## Running socks

Find the right socks that suit your feet – it's as simple as that!

Socks with a waterproof layer are not recommended. Water penetration whilst swimming can cause an unpleasant feeling.

## Swimming cap

The swimming cap is usually provided by the organiser so that everyone taking part in the race can go home with a nice souvenir. An additional neoprene swim cap also is recommended for swimming in cooler waters. For those who find taking a cap on and off too cumbersome, a neoprene headband is also available. This will keep the most sensitive areas on the head warm and can be easily removed.

During short running sections, it's worth keeping your swimming cap on whilst running longer passages it's definitely worth removing the cap. **Keep your head cool!**



**ICEBUG**

**ICEBUG**  
Acceleritas5 RB9X Shoes



**GOCOCO**  
Compression Superior Running Socks



**HEAD**

**HEAD**  
Neo Bathing Cap 3mm

## Swimming goggles



**HEAD**

**HEAD**  
Tiger Mid Mirrored Goggle

The swimming goggles should fit naturally and not too tight around your eyes, water proof and fog resistant. Everyone should make their own choice about what goggles to use. It is advised to choose a pair that can be hung around your neck to prevent loss whilst navigating running sections.

Goggles aren't necessary in all swimming conditions but in others they are an essential component. Invest in some 'anti-fog' spray if you often experience frustrating foggy glasses.

## Pull buoy



**ARENA**  
Freeflow

Another important item in Swimrun is the pull buoy. These come prefabricated, can be handmade from bottles or even developed into a super buoy consisting of two single pull buoys. If you would like to make your own, you will find building instructions online. It is important that the pull buoy provides enough buoyancy while swimming and ensures a good position in the water. This allows you to rest your legs during swimming sections and save your energy for your next run.

Once you start running again, it is important that the carried pull buoy does not bother you. That is why most swimrunners usually fix the buoy to their thigh using a rubber band. Alternatively, the whole thing can be attached to your back and effectively stowed away.

## Swim fins



**HEAD**

**HEAD**  
Energy Fin

The use of fins has been experiments with at Swimruns for many years. As you can imagine, the leg work support certainly helps during long swimming sections. On the other hand, those using fins risk missing out on the possibility of leg regeneration during their swims. Additionally, carrying the fins during run sections, as well as dressing and undressing, can prove difficult.

Recently, the use of fins has become more and more popular, leading some operations to introduce strict regulations and only allow certain fin lengths.





**HEAD**

**HEAD**  
Contour Fin

## Swim paddles

Paddles come in many shapes, materials and sizes. You will have to decide for yourself whether you prefer small finger paddles or large XXL boards, materials such as carbon, rubber, PVC or neoprene, and ergonomically shaped, round or glove-like forms. The best way to find out which is the best for you is during your swim training, because regular practice with paddles is mandatory – otherwise you risk power problems or even shoulder injuries during competitions.

Training with swim paddles increases strength and enhances speed and endurance. You will learn the best arm and hand positions to oppose the water with the greatest power. In competition, this improved method and increased strength will hopefully come to full development. If you would like to use the paddles for race orientation, you can also label them with racing distances and times.



**ORCA**

**ORCA**  
Bungee Cord

## The pull cord

Frequently questioned by beginners, but considered indispensable by advanced Swimrunners: the pull cord. It serves to support each other – both in the water and on the land.

During swim sections, the rope allows the stronger swimmer to give their team partner a little pull. It also prevents team partners losing each other due to high speed differences, high waves or amid other participants. Also, during runs, one team partner can support the other during a sudden phase of weakness – and the team can maintain an average racing speed between them.

Pull cords are usually elastic and have different profiles. It is important to find the right rope form and (most importantly!) a perfectly matched rope length, whilst training. The right form and length should enable one team member to comfortably swim in the water shadow of their partner.

## Safety equipment



swimrunners

SWIMRUNNERS  
Waterproof

The most important piece of „**safety equipment**“ you can have at a Swimrun is your team partner. This is why you should never be more than 10 metres apart from each other. Swimrun races also require other safety equipment as you travel through wild terrain and open waters, and you may need to respond to emergency situations or to call for help.

Accordingly, regulators often provide a compass, whistle and a waterproof first aid kit. In addition, a GPS device is provided at many events, so that Swimrun participants can be tracked by the organisers during the race. Safety is paramount at all competitions. So, it is not surprising that safety equipment is closely inspected before each race begins.

## Extras

Some extras that you may wish to take with you on your Swimrun include: energy bars or gels, plasters, necessary medicines, sun and cold protection creams, a waterproof sports watch with GPS or Swimrun function, arm and leg warmers, a card case, a route note with running or swimming distances, belt bag, etc. However, never forget: **less is more!**

One of the major brands that specialises in Swimrun equipment is HEAD.

Check out our range of Swimrun accessories and

HEAD products under the :

[addnature Swimrun section](#)



## ***What needs to be considered while Swimrun training?***

When it comes to Swimrun, many beginners hear the name of the event and feel that after a bit of swimming and running a few kilometres they will be well prepared for their first Swimrun. But it's not that easy. After all, you complete the race in a team, it requires special equipment and the training track on your doorstep rarely resembles the course you will actually race on. Therefore, it is advisable to align your training with the actual nature of the sport of Swimrun, rather than just considering isolated disciplines and undertaking training that is unrelated to the race you will face.

With this in mind, it is strongly recommended that you train alongside your competition partner. Only in this way will you get to know the strengths and weaknesses of your team partner, and be able to practise certain competitive situations – such as swimming in the water shadow, running in the field or dealing with a pull cord. Joint participation in test races (running events, long-distance swimming) is also important. It will allow team partner to check their respective performance level in competitive conditions and adjust individual training intensity accordingly.

Swimrun equipment should also be regularly used during training. Swimming with paddles is especially recommended, as if used only in competition they threaten at best, loss of power, and at worst, shoulder pain and injury.

The application and organisation of equipment should also be practiced. It is easy for an inexperienced team to lose time during a race at various exchange stations; due to clumsy attempts to organise their pull buoy, bathing cap and goggles with paddles on their hands. The result? They are not fast enough in the competition, miss easy **“cut-off”** points and face a premature end to their race,

all due to unnecessary delays.

Of course, it is also recommended to practice running in a wetsuit and swimming with shoes on so you can get used to the way these items affect your movement and make any necessary modifications.

This also means that your body will already be accustomed to the exercise – even during the unusually rapid change of discipline (swimming / running) and related conditions (horizontal / vertical body position, cold / hot temperature).





A good tip for Swimrun beginners: get online and closely study videos of previous Swimruns. Observe and learn something of the specifics of each race, the equipment used and the technology of the participating athletes. You can then use this knowledge to adjust your own training accordingly.

Otherwise, it is important to consider the actual race course during training. If you may face high sea waves during your race, your local swimming pool or lake might not be the best place to simulate the competition. And those who have signed up for a mountain race will need to consider how to best get their legs fit for the mountains. Many a Swimrun enthusiast has spent a lot of time training up and down their stairs – or on holidays where a beautiful coast presents plenty of trail running opportunities.

One final note regarding your basic training: it is best to join a club. Firstly, you will train under expert supervision, improving among other things, your running and swimming techniques. Secondly, you will often have access to special training facilities and follow an individual training plan recommended by your instructor (which will not just focus on physical training; but also allow for regeneration). Lastly, the club bond will help you to resist your inner weaknesses, for eg. when it comes to morning swims.

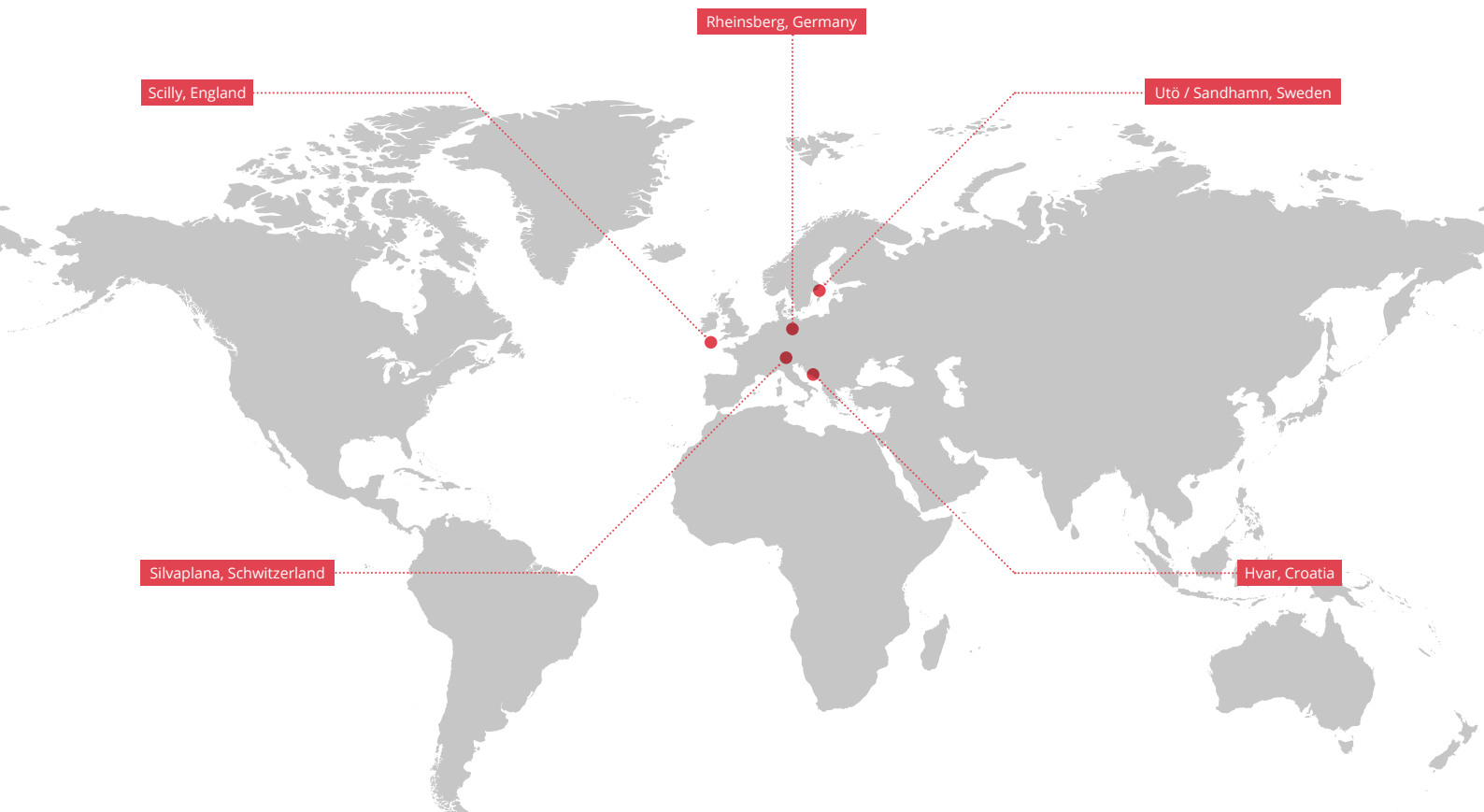


## ***Information on Swimrun competitions***

A few years ago you could count the number of Swimruns offered on one hand – and these were only ever found in Sweden. But those days are over. There are now Swimrun competitions held throughout the whole of Europe and new events are popping up even as far away as Australia, Asia and America.

Various racing series are already available. However, it is of course, the well-known ÖTILLÖ event series that really stands out – it is the origin of the sport and has naturally strongly influenced it. The ÖTILLÖ World Series now contains a number of international races, as the organisers follow their motto: “unique races in unique places”. Thus, no two races are the same and competitors are free to choose between a wide variety of events – and to discover the Swedish archipelago, German lakes and forests, the Croatian and British islands or Swiss peaks and mountain lakes. More ÖTILLÖ events are already being planned.

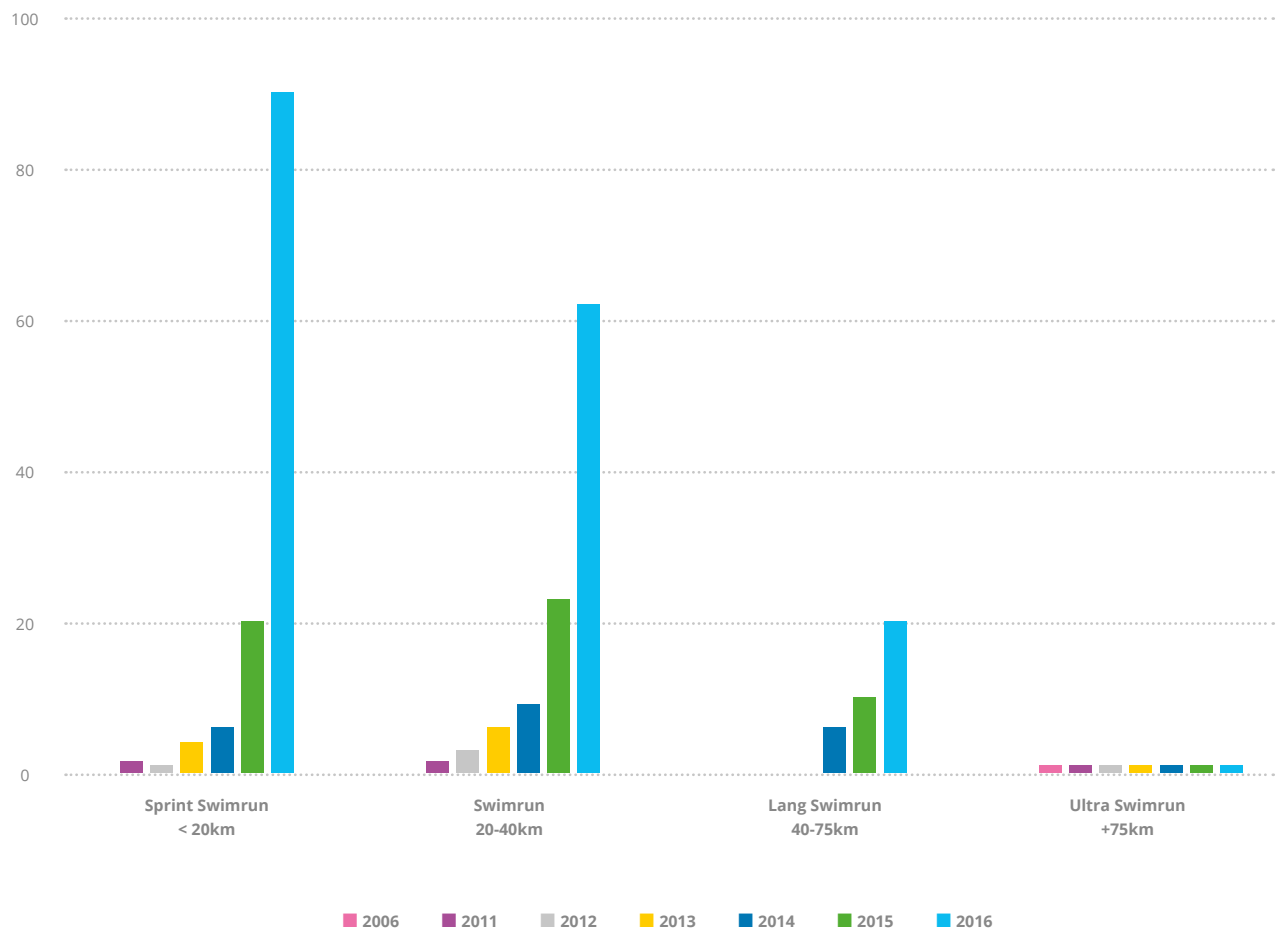
### **ÖTILLÖ-venues:**



The annual highlight is the ÖTILLÖ Swimrun World Championship, usually held in September in Sweden, for it is important to qualify either directly through various qualifying races or a points system. However, a small number of places are still awarded to ambitious newcomers and sponsors, or given away to a few soldiers of fortune. The race contains a total of 65 kilometres of running and 10 kilometres of swimming and time windows are closely set and measured on site. This race features the crème de la crème of the Swimrun sport. Where the inventors of the adventure were on the road for about 26 hours, it now takes these elite athletes less than eight hours to get from Sandhamn to Utö.

The 75 km length of this route may not appeal to everyone. But since there are now around 300 Swimrun events offered all around the world per year, hopefully anyone interested in taking part in one will find the perfect event for them – with the kind of distance and terrain they are looking for

### Type of Swimrun races each year





## *What is left to say?*

Swimrun is not a temporary fad – or to put it in the words of co-inventors Michael Lemmel and Mats Skott: **“Swimrun is here to stay”**. They have managed to develop a sport from a crazy idea that finds new followers ever year.

For swimrunners the joy of the event is multifaceted: the return to nature, the adventure, the simplicity of the sport, the team spirit, the struggle with both the elements and themselves and the incidental discovery of many beautiful natural landscapes.

The nature of future Swimruns is still uncertain. Will they manage to maintain the adventurous essence of the sport? Or will time threaten stricter regulations, possibly even by an association? How will the development of equipment continue? How soon can we expect electronic swimming navigation or running shoes with detachable fins? Question after question, which maybe you can think about on your next Swimrun. Or maybe not.



## **Interview:** **Swimrun Athlete André Hook**



**»When I'm running, I'm looking forward to swimming and in the water I want to get back on land«**

### **Hello André, please tell us a little bit about yourself:**

My name is André Hook, I am 38 years old and live in Hamburg. Here I perform a balancing act between family, work and sport. This is not easy, if you want to sleep a bit.

### **How did you get into Swimrun?**

I have always run a lot – no matter whether I'm taking part in race competitions or in the mountains. For example, in 2011 I travelled the famous Alpentour from Munich to Venice with my brother-in-law Wolfgang. The next year we wanted a similar adventure and so we swam across Slovenia. Then a friend from our triathlon club said that we should combine the whole thing and forwarded a link to a video of the ÖTILLÖ Swimrun World Championship in Sweden. We were immediately excited at the thought, our training intensified and it felt like almost as soon as we qualified for the World Cup, we were already at the next ÖTILLÖ event. Then a fantastic adventure in the middle of nature was upon on us - and the result was surprisingly good for two newcomers. Afterwards we discovered together that this sport is exactly "our thing" and since then we have been excited for further Swimruns in the most beautiful natural paradise in the world.

### **You compete together with your partner. How did you find each other?**

Wolf is not just my team partner; he is also my brother-

in-law and colleague. I learnt about him through my wife. At family celebrations it was soon clear that we both shared a love for endurance sports. And then we just started out touring together, or competing against each other in competitions. Since "against each other" is only half as beautiful as "with each other", we are glad that we have been fighting side by side at Swimruns for a couple of years and motivating each other. Thanks to my move from Potsdam to Hamburg, we are now even able to train together. Since 2017 we have been working in the same company and so some of our lunch breaks have been used for competition preparation.

### **Do you and your partner regularly train together?**

Yes, we try to train together as often as possible. Apart from our athletic and interval training sessions during lunch breaks, we often meet at the GroÙensee near Hamburg to do smaller swim exercises. We are still getting funny looks, but more and more we discover neoprene-clad athletes rushing through the woods, then jumping into the lake with their shoes on their feet.

During the week we also train separately. Wolf, for example, swims in the club, while I hit the gym early in the morning. And since we often commute in our jogging shoes and live in different districts in Hamburg, we are rarely together on the road.

### **How many races have you taken part in?**

I've stopped counting the number of races, but if I had to guess, I'd say it has been about 20 since our debut in 2014. Up until only a few years ago you could easily participate in all the races in a season, because the number of competitions was manageable. Now, there are many hundreds of races all over the world, so you have to think carefully about where to start. We look for an advantageous swim-run ratio and ensure that we have sufficient recreational and recovery time between competitions. Each year about eight events come together, with the latest being the World Cup in Sweden. After that you feel pretty flat and look forward to a bit of regeneration and rest in November and December.

### **What has been your favourite experience at a Swimrun?**

Successes are always great and of course a few results also make us very proud. But my personal highlight is and will remain an experience at the ÖTILLÖ Swimrun Engadin in 2014. We were well in the race after about two hours and had only two teams left in front of us. In our euphoria we did not pay attention and missed a signpost that we should have paid attention to. About 10 minutes later we realised that we had lost our way. The disappointment lasted only a few seconds, because after that we mobilised all of our forces, went back to the last point of orientation and were able to fight in the remainder of the race all the way back from the 20th place to the 4th place. That was enough to qualify for the World Cup. And so, while we missed the podium, I was extremely happy and proud.

### **Do you have a favourite of the disciplines (do you prefer to swim or to run)?**

In the race itself, the next discipline is always my favourite discipline - that is, when I'm running, I'm looking forward to swimming and in the water I want to get back on land. This is probably because you are often „on the limit“ and the change promises some recovery. But it re-

ally does not work out very well.

Otherwise, I am probably more a runner than a swimmer. I was just too late to swimming, because in the early years, the perfect technique is easier to learn. Fortunately, a few tools are allowed in our sport and with a pull buoy and paddles I can compensate for my weakness in swimming.

### **Is there a Swimrun route that you have found particularly beautiful?**

This sport has taken us to so many fantastic places. For example, I think of the Swimruns in the Norwegian fjords, the Scottish highlands or the Swiss mountains. But when it comes to the ÖTILLÖ World Championships in the Stockholm archipelago at the beginning of September, this is the place that fascinates me again and again. The islands, the often raging sea and the enthusiastic people on and along the route form a simply unique backdrop, which I look forward to 364 days a year.

### **What is the fascination with this sport?**

This is a dangerous question because there is so much that fascinates me about Swimruns. If I describe everything, it would take too long. So here are just a few quick thoughts: I like being close to nature. I like the many challenges that await the athletes in addition to running and swimming (orientation, cold / heat, material damage, etc.) I think it's great to have a race as a team; so you can motivate and support yourself and experience the competition together. I love the trips to the racetracks - without which we would not have discovered some amazing places. And I'm glad that the sport gives me so much motivation for (almost) daily training. Without the anticipation for this or that Swimrun I probably would not get out of bed so easily...

**»Eat well, get a good night's sleep – and you're ready to go!«**



### **How do you prepare for a competition?**

In the winter, we work on basics and complete small races to test our current fitness levels. From spring, the training intensifies and is aligned to the competition. We always look for a lot of variety and also for possibilities for regeneration. We no longer train just in the pool, but as often as possible in the open water too. We practice discipline changes because many teams lose a lot of time on these during the race. We also have a lot of fun with running, so it's never boring thanks to fast intervals, stairs, mountain biking and quiet work-out stages. One week before the race, we'll go down the training and focus on the competition details so we know exactly what sections are waiting for us during the race. Then eat well, sleep a lot – and then we are ready to go!

### **How much time do you spend on this sport?**

About a few hours every week - but I really enjoy every second of the training and the competitions. Mostly I swim 3-4 times a week for about 1-2 hours and run parallel 60-100 kilometres (as mentioned: partly on the way to work). Added to this is a bit of time for athletic training.

### **What are your hobbies besides from Swimrun?**

Swimrun training and competitions already take up quite a bit of time. And even though I try to distribute the training sessions so that they do not interfere with my family, I have to make sure that there are not other time-eaters. That's why my family are always on board and together we travel a lot, spend a lot of time in nature, go to the cinema, or listen to music.

### **Do you have any tips for those who are interested in Swimrun and would like to try the sport?**

Swimrun is easy to try out. You can either search on the Internet for like-minded people, who are running and swimming somewhere in your region. Or take part in test events - we organise, for example, small sample Swimruns at the Großensee near Hamburg and always bring along a little rental equipment for others to try.

**Thank you very much for the interview André!**

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For more information on André Hook and his partner go to [www.swimrun.de](http://www.swimrun.de)



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