

After my previous record back in 2015, I had no idea that I would go for a second attempt. Past year the sea began to call again. I waited together with a Spanish team past year (2017) on perfect weather, with no success. It was only this summer, after waiting a few months, that I saw an opportunity.

I had also contact with Eddie and Jens, a German team that had the ambition to attempt to cross the North Sea. We shared information and knowledge. We agreed to stay in contact and start together if possible. They would make the same trajectory as I did in 2015.

So, we got together during the night in Nieuwpoort harbor on Wednesday 1st of August 2018. Both the German team and myself had made practically the same navigational planning and we wished each other success. I must say that it was an honor to depart together with them. I said goodbye to my wife and children. My wife Sylvie is my support team and keeps keep contact with Oostende Radio on the Belgian side, and Dover Coast Guard on the UK side. Both services were informed properly about our intentions.

At 01 o'clock (local time), I started from the slipway at Nieuwpoort harbor, Belgium. I had some light from the full moon. I started at a pace I could keep up for hours without stopping or resting. When I left the safety of the harbor, all stress was away, I felt alive! Although it was too dark to see a thing, I knew my way around. This first part was a home run in my back yard so to speak. I chose to leave at this hour because of the tidal stream. I wanted the stream against me during the first six hours. I rather have it along the Belgian coast where it less powerful (but not to be mistaken) than on the UK side, where it is almost double the speed. I passed the Trapegeer buoy when the stream was still building up against me. Between here and the next buoy, the DY1, is a real battle. A battle against the tide, a battle against shortage of sleep and I must be alert for other ships who couldn't see me. During the night I had only a force 2 headwind. I was relentlessly pushed back by the tidal stream and the wind during the very short breaks. One of the things I enjoyed most was sunrise. I took a very short break at that moment, so I could see the sun coming up.

When finally arriving at the DY1 buoy it was almost slack water. Taking it easy now is not an option, since I need this advantage badly to reach the final section in time (also tidal stream related). From the DY1 buoy I hopped to the SE Ruytingen buoy and finally the NW Ruytingen buoy, where the international shipping lane starts. I was there a bit too soon. I set course to the WSW Sandettie buoy. I saw that my speed was decreasing very much due to the stream that still went SW. Soon I took the decision to deviate the planned route and head towards the Sandettie light ship. The downside was that I crossed this part of the shipping lane at a sloping angle instead of as straight as possible. I had no other choice however, because my speed was almost gone too, which makes a straight crossing of the shipping lane in this case even more dangerous. So, to the light ship it was! Except for one sailing vessel, I did not pass any professional shipping on this section. My speed increased and so I could take all the benefit I needed to go on.

When reaching the Sandettie light ship I was excited. I always had an interest in ships, beacons, buoys, and now this one was ticked off on my list. The second thing I was excited about was that I could now see the white cliffs of Dover in the distance. The next buoy, SW Sandettie, was close and so was the second part of the shipping lane. I was able to cross it straighter. During the crossing of the shipping lane I only saw two merchant ships, that was all. Leaving the shipping lane behind it set course to the Goodwin light ship. Also, not on my initial plan, but since I deviated I had to adapt. There was very little tidal stream during this part, I could reach it without compensating a lot. It was slack water, but a bit choppy due to the area I'm in, the Goodwin Sands. I took a last break and I

made a call with the VHF to the Dover Coast Guard to state my position and status. On their turn, they informed my wife (support team) about that.

I knew from the previous time that the last section should be worse now due to the wind. The wind was increasing to force 3-4 from the side (WSW) and the current should pick up in the northerly direction any time soon. So, I started heading to the harbor of Ramgate, which I could not see at this point. The waves were there all the time from this point on, due the current pushing over the Goodwin Sands and the wind. It decreases the much-needed speed to aim for the harbor. The more I closed in on land, the harder the tidal stream was pushing from the port side. With a lot of persistence, I reached Ramsgate harbor, finally!! My wife and two children were there, waving and yelling. I was relieved, happy, excited, exhausted and had a feeling that I could take on the whole world while being so tired that I could capsize in the blink of an eye, all at the same time. Just to be correct, after greeting my family, I paddled on to the slipway. It was only there that I switched of my GPS. I had paddled **107 kilometers** and spend **17hours and 48minutes** doing so. After taking a shower and eating a hot meal, we went back home by ferry.

My first time in 2015 was perfect, weather was perfect, the sea was flat. This time the weather was good..... only good, not perfect. No kayaker talks about force 3 or 4 unless you're on a mission like this one. I could adapt, as I'm usually doing. But the constant headwind in the first half, and the portside wind on the last section took their toll. I have no regrets, but I have made it myself more difficult by taking this crossing on during these conditions. Make no mistake, the sea is boss, you're not. Even with a lot of training and preparation, it's the sea that will decide whether you're ready for it, or not.

I wish to thank my family from all my heart for their continuously and unconditional support on all that I do or undertake! Were it not for them, I would not have done this. Thank you, thank you!

Special thanks to the people from Ostend Radio (MRCC Oostende-Belgian Coast Guard) and Dover Coast Guard (UK) for virtually watching over me during the crossing, again!

The specifications:

Sea kayak: P&H Cetus Mv (customized kevlar-carbon expedition version)

Paddles: VE Explorer (medium blades + spare paddle)

Full safety gear including VHF radio, PLB, pyrotechnical flare, ODEO flare, cell phone, first aid kit, repair kit, paddle-float, pump.....

Paddle safe and take care of each other on the water!

Dimitri Vandepoele