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A Journey Through Mindset of the Ice and the Adventure to Cape Horn: Ireland Medal Ceremony Invited Address

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A Journey Through Mindset of the Ice and the Adventure to Cape Horn:
Ireland Medal Ceremony Invited Address
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We are all the sums of our parts and who we are in water is clearly defined by where and how we find our limits. Up to that point I prepare and cover for all eventualities. My motto in life is “I can only swim the water in front of me”.

I grew up in a fishing family where a Sunday treat was being brought out into the harbour. As a child I would jump off the boat and swim home. Risk and survival was our daily lesson of where to go, tides, and how to navigate. It was a natural progression for me to move into extreme open water swimming. At an early stage I found myself as a swim organiser with the aim of bringing swimmers from confined and pool environments to deep open water. I was often shocked during an open water swim to discover how inexperienced swimmers were when it often was too late to turn back. This then required diverting my rescue cover to act as personal cover for some swimmers.

As an open water swimmer, the Round Ireland Swim was the greatest learning experience of my life. As swimmers we were exposed to life threatening situations multiple times. What we were privileged to work with were the most professional of rescue units who daily assessed risk with us and therein lay the basis for my growth as an extreme swimmer. Swimming across every bay and lough in Ireland, often up to 20 miles off shore, this rescue unit set the minimum standard of care that I would now consider necessary.

Life changed for me in 2011 when I became *time poor*, and I drifted into Ice Swimming mainly as a long-distance swim was 40 minutes. Temperatures around our coasts drop as low as 7°C. The experiences of completing 1000m in 0°C water was one of the most awakening events in my life. The body and the mind were the most heightened at this level of risk but the moment you lose focus you also lose control. Without a controlled and measured way into the sport this was quite a dangerous area of swimming. Support teams are a life line so swimmers always need to get the best they can. In 2013 I worked with the Russian Military on a fully operational military hospital ship which was our support cover for the Bering Strait Relay.

In 2014 I set up and worked with a group of swimmers in Camlough Lake who wanted to train for 1000m Irish Championship In-Ice which was an eye-opening experience managing their journey. I suddenly became aware that removing all the risk did not prepare them to deal with the variables that happen when they are on their own. We focused on medical and recovery and applying the basics to other swimmers was a supreme learning skill for me as well. Sometimes we forgot that the learning capacity of other swimmers may not be at our own level.

From 2015 onward I worked on understanding the physiological responses to the freezing temperatures while liaising with Russian medical doctors who had

my cardiac files from events since 2012, working with the World Extreme Medicine team, working my way onto the Ocean Extreme Medicine teaching faculty on the risks of open water swimming. The sport was growing and so too were the risks being taken by swimmers. Many were exiting the 'swim' in a compromised state. Over the years, in extreme swimming, I have worked with rescue services, fought hard to change the constitution, and to enforce safety procedures. As the sport grew into a world championship I realised that I had brought the safety measures as far as I could and decided to work with medical teams, in the hope of developing increased personal responsibility.

As an open water swimmer, I felt I had lost myself and my own journey in pools and in confined spaces of ice and the limits of competition had taken away my own adrenaline. The swim across the southern tip of Cape Horn in water temperature of 7°C and water so big that loss of life was the greatest challenge. I paid to bring dive medics with me and also spent a few months working with Dr. Patrick Buck on remote emergency care, and mostly to experience what I personally deemed to be my main strength which was the willingness to let go of the boat and trust myself and my team. We learned much about ourselves in these conditions. As I said at the beginning we are the sum of our parts. I believe that in open water swimming we need to start again. We need to retrain swimmer's brains but mostly force education and understanding of risk and how to self-rescue when needed on them. Many are merely signing up and jumping in, but then are not growing through their journey.

I have brought you through my personal journey into the Ice. How I have responded and trained and how the mind and the body together can work against us when hypothermia-related injuries set in.



Kerry woman Nuala Moore is a world leading extreme swimmer. She describes distance swimming in freezing ice water as “one of the most amazing experiences of learning, of self-discovery, and mindfulness.” In 2006 she was one of the team who relayed around the Island of Ireland (1,330 km in 56 days) and was also a member of the team who swam from Russia to the USA across the notorious Bering Strait over 6 days. In 2012 she transitioned to swimming at 0°C ice water. She was the International Ice Swimming Association World Ambassador of the Year 2014/2015 for her work on safety. Nuala published “An Insight into the World of Ice Swimming” in 2016. In April 2018 she was the first person to successfully swim the one mile imaginary meridian line that separates the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans off the notorious Cape Horn (east to west) along with a crossing of the Italy Glacier Beagle Channel in 3°C water.