

Human race

Ordinary runners doing extraordinary things



Island records

Tim Marklowski created adventure on his own terms when he crossed from Corsica to Sardinia

Most people don't spend their honeymoon plotting future trips that will take them away from their new spouse for weeks on end, but that's where Tim Marklowski's mind went as he travelled the Italian coastline, sailing and rock climbing, with his wife. As their boat crossed the Strait of Bonifacio, the 11km gap that divides the islands of Corsica and Sardinia, he wondered if anyone had ever swum it.

Turns out, it's a regular challenge for serious swimmers, despite currents making it only sporadically crossable. What no one had done before, however, was attempt to travel from the northernmost point of Corsica to the southernmost of Sardinia, adding the islands' two toughest hiking trails into the mix.

Tim conceived a multi-section triathlon for September 2025: bike-run-bike-swim-bike-run-bike from Barcaggio to Spiaggia Su Giudeu; the runs taking place along 180km of the GR20 hiking trail in Corsica and the shorter but more treacherous 40km Selvaggio Blu ('Wild Blue') on the eastern coast of Sardinia. The latter is unmarked aside from the odd cairn, has no water points and includes rock climbing and abseiling sections.

His four separate bike rides totalled 640km on roads, and the swim, as it wasn't between the absolute closest land points, was 13.1km, in four hours three minutes



Tim planned his own multi-section triathlon

– including dodging jellyfish and throwing up. All in: 873km and 25,000 metres of elevation gain in 12 days. Hiking just the GR20 and Selvaggio Blu would standardly take 15 and five days respectively. And, strictly speaking, an additional four days should be added to his time; a tense wait for the strait to be swimmable, which thankfully allowed him to recover from a leg injury from the GR20.

Although he was first, Tim doesn't mind that someone else will probably do it faster in future. 'For me, it was about bringing together everything I've learned: rock climbing, sailing, swimming and so on. I like to be an all-terrain animal,' he says. 'It was also about showing that you can do big challenges in an ecologically friendly way, without flying. You don't need to go to the Himalayas.'

Outside of this challenge, Tim's 2025, including his day job, was centred on outdoor

adventures. Born in Bavaria, he's now based in Bern, where he has worked as an IFMGA-qualified mountain guide since 2022. With clients, last year, he also spent a month ice climbing in Italy, tackled the North Face of the Eiger, and tried to get from Switzerland's lowest point to its highest within 24 hours by cycling, running and climbing from Lake Locarno to the summit of Dufourspitze. They were a frustrating 23 minutes over the self-imposed deadline.

If it sounds like he might not have much time for running, he says it's always been part of his routine. 'Since I was a child, there has never been a time when I didn't run.' He trained for the Corsica/Sardinia challenge by running up to meet his clients at mountain huts. He got ready for the island crossing through swims of up to 10km in his local pool, and didn't specifically train on the bike, 'Other than to get my butt used to the saddle,' assuming that the other activities would give sufficient fitness. He loved the difference between the GR20 and the Selvaggio Blu. 'Running and hiking in Corsica was more mountainous, almost alpine and cold,' he says. 'Sardinia felt more Mediterranean and wilder; you feel more like you're on an island because the trail is along the coast.'

He describes finishing the challenge as 'unspectacular', arriving at the bottom of Sardinia on his bike in the dark, on the phone to his wife so as not to feel completely alone. 'I touched the water, then realised I'd booked my accommodation for the night 6km away!'

But this was the adventure he wanted: solitude in truly wild nature, not an organised race. 'It was hard, but it also had a relaxing side,' he says. 'You have a structure, but within that structure you're free – especially if you're alone. It was relaxing for the mind. It was like a vacation for the head.'

FIVE THINGS TIM TOOK ON HIS TRIATHLON

BIKE
Cube Agree
C:62 SLX, £4,199
Tim found this high-end road bike second-hand. It's an aerodynamic ride with a carbon frame.
cubestores.co.uk

BACKPACK
Black Diamond
Distance 15L, £112
This hybrid pack has 'suspension' for running and extra storage.
eu.blackdiamond.com
equipment.com

SHOES
La Sportiva
Prodigio Pro, £170
With a 6mm drop and 4mm lugs, this shoe is aimed at ultrarunners who also want some speed.
lasportiva.com

WETSUIT
Zoot Kona 2.0, £328
A suit for swimming that boasts AquaLift buoyancy technology to lift the hips as well as stretch fabric in the arms.
zootsports.eu

ROPE
10.0 Performance
Static Rope, £120 for 50m
Weighing in at 66g per metre, this rope, according to Mammut, is 'very abrasion-proof'.
mammut.com

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