

Underwater . . . Peel Biog. Bk. NOT FOR CIRCULATION

# Meek completes swim

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By JOHN STEWART

"I imagined it would be cold and merciless, but it was more than that."

Richard Meek didn't think it would be easy to conquer Lake Ontario, but it was even more difficult than he'd imagined.

"I thought many times of giving up," remarked the Mississauga man as he sat red-eyed and recuperating in Etobicoke's Humber Bay West Park yesterday afternoon.

"I'm mentally very proud of myself," continued the scuba diver, "and of my staff. They kept me going."

Meek was in the lake for over 24 hours when he saw the Molson's marine cruiser and then the Scarborough Bluffs and knew he was close to his goal.

Heavy winds and currents had blown Meek, the second man to cross Lake Ontario underwater, far off course. The water temperature had dropped from its high of about 78 degrees during the swim to nearly 48 degrees Fahrenheit.

Mississauga Dr. Jim Miller used a transmitter in a capsule swallowed by Meek to take his temperature and found he was within one degree of the critical level in body temperature. Meek was hauled into the boat, put into the last in a series of new wetsuits as the boat carried him west to a point just offshore from Humber Bay Park.

By the time Dr. Miller and Meek jumped into the lake again, there were four-foot swells preventing them from even seeing each other at most times. The pair had difficulty finding the entrance to the park harbor and headed for the breakwater, scrambling out of the water to claim success.

While a host of reporters and television cameras waited in another part of the park, only a couple of passers-by witnessed the end of the swim. Dr. Miller found it appropriate that a "select few" got to witness the end of the event, and Meek had a chance to catch his breath before the flurry of interviews with the exhausted swimmer began.

The musician, whose wife of one day was one of three divers who swam with him for safety, says the swim was "the toughest thing I've ever done."

He was frequently nauseous, and constantly cold. Visibility was extraordinarily poor so that his plans to scuba dive had to be abandoned early. The safe-

ty swimmers had difficulty keeping track of Meek, until he began to use a snorkel and swim closer to the surface.

An underwater speaker system designed to keep him awake was ineffective because the hood of his suit and the bubbles from his air regulator drowned out the instructions he was receiving.

Meek was even seasick on the boat trip to the starting point of the swim, Niagara-on-the-Lake. Because of problems with one boat, the entourage didn't arrive in the city until 2:30 a.m. Wednesday. Their scheduled departure time of 8 a.m. had to be delayed.

Strobe lights which Meek was to follow to keep him on course weren't visible in the black murk of the lake overnight. Both Meek and Dr. Miller, who frequently swam as a support diver, said the night swimming was eerie. "It was absolutely depressing," remarked Dr. Miller. "It was pitch black and all you could see were the two lights in front of you."

"Everything went wrong, it seemed," Meek said. "It was like it wasn't meant to be." When the group finally felt it would make it despite the problems, the winds and currents carried them far off course as the water temperature plummeted.

Problems with the swim extended to the fund-raising efforts. Despite extensive advance publicity, there was almost no response from the public to donate to the Hospital for Sick Children. No figures were available yesterday on the money raised during the swim.

Asked if he'd consider making the effort again, an obviously fatigued Meek said it was "a little premature" to consider that. "I may do something for Mississauga Hospital next year, but it will take a lot more preparation."

The swim was a family affair for Meek. As well as his new wife, Meek's dog Sandy also made the trip. The water-loving animal threatened to jump into the lake to join his master several times.

Sandy was much more than a mascot on the trip, insisted Meek as he posed for photographs with his support staff and his dog.

"He was the only one who didn't get seasick," the diver laughed.

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**Congratulated by his wife Michelle (right) and marathon swimmer Richard Meek describes his another enthusiastic supporter, Mississauga day-long ordeal in Lake Ontario to the press.**  
(Staff photo by Tim Chevrier)