MY BIG SWIM was 26.2 miles in Lake Windermere. I’ve since found out that a swimming marathon is only 10K!

I swam with my pal Jon Grundy, who has been a GB age-group triathlete and high-level junior swimmer. I don’t enjoy swimming in the sea, so we chose Windermere because it’s so long. The 26.2 miles adds up to two and a half lengths of the lake. We swam one length in training, feeding every 45 minutes.

For the full marathon we wore wetsuits with compression clothing beneath. Kayaker Pete May guided us and we had a back-up crew in a dinghy providing food, drinks and Vaseline, which they rubbed into our necks to prevent chafing. I was nervous about the 6am start because I don’t like swimming in the dark. But when we got to the entry point near Ambleside I was remarkably calm. The water was pan-flat, and the pink skies at sunrise were unbelievable.

Near Belle Isle we ran aground, because we’d gone too close to the shore to avoid blue-green algae. There were yacht and power boat races going on, which kept us entertained. The first length of 11.2 miles took less than five hours, but just before half way back the water temperature suddenly dropped and I went into a major freeze. By then we’d been swimming for 7½ hours. I blocked out the cold but the crew were concerned. About 45 minutes later we reached a warmer patch and I started feeling okay again. By then, the team were de-layering because it was such a beautiful day. That made me chuckle!

At the second turn at Ambleside I was super-excited, but the hardest bit was still to come. My arms were killing me and our finish point at Bowness didn’t seem to be getting closer. Eventually we reached the shore.

We finished in 13 hours 25 minutes and I should have been highly emotional. But I’d switched off my brain because I was so cold. The next day, one forearm was swollen and I couldn’t raise the other. It was a big struggle to eat, drink, even get dressed. Jon was the same. It hasn’t put us off though, and now we want to beat the world lake relay record. We might need Keri-Anne Payne for that!

For more information on pancreatic cancer visit justgiving.com/tanja-slater

TANJA SLATER, 35
A former GB elite cyclist and triathlete, Tanja is raising funds for the charity Pancreatic Cancer UK. Her father is a rare survivor of the disease.
Two athletes have created a novel open water challenge by swimming 26.2 miles – the distance of a marathon – for charity.

It took Tanja Slater and Jon Grundy under 14 hours to complete 2.5 lengths of Windermere – the third of five tests Slater has set herself to raise funds for a cause close to her heart.

‘My biggest worry was the cold and the dark,’ she admits. ‘And I’m scared of jellyfish so the Channel wasn’t an option.’

Slater, 35, chose the five challenges because she wanted to raise funds for research into pancreatic cancer. Her father, GB age group triathlete Trace Allen, is a rare survivor of the disease and chair of trustees for the charity Pancreatic Cancer UK.

Spells without alcohol and talking (friends were sceptical) were the first tests for Preston-based Slater, with a tough bike ride in France and the 2014 Berlin Marathon scheduled.

For her swim, England’s longest lake was the obvious location. Friend and swimming companion Jon Grundy from nearby Chorley had no hesitation in joining her.

Grundy, 30, was twice a junior nationals 200m fly finalist and is another GB age group triathlete. He had unfinished business in Windermere, after the cold forced his retirement from a one-length event in 2012.

The duo completed a single length of the lake without incident – ‘a great milestone’ for Grundy, he says. Then, at 6am on September 28, they slipped into a pan-flat Windermere near Ambleside.

‘There was something very magical about getting in with a kayak, one other swimmer and nothing else,’ Slater says.

Kayaker Pete May guided the duo along Windermere’s western edge with a support crew in a dinghy providing drinks, bars and gels every 45 minutes. They reached the southern end of the lake in five hours but on the return

Slater ‘went into a major freeze’. She warmed up as they neared Ambleside again just as Grundy was hitting his low point. ‘Things ahead didn’t seem to be getting any closer and after the turn, our finish point at Bowness seemed to move further away.’

Reach the finish they did, though, after 13hr 25min. I was quite calm and only after a couple of days did I realise how huge an achievement it was,’ Slater beamed. ‘I was knackered.’ Grundy added: ‘But I’d do it again.’

A Gloucestershire lido has broken an ‘impossible’ record that had stood for 54 years, thanks to the prolonged good weather in the summer.

By October 2, the Sandford Parks Lido at Cheltenham had already seen 204,753 visitors pass through its turnstiles, breaking the record of 201,000 people who used the facility in 1959.

For many years this had seemed an impossible record to break, although we came close in 2006 with 196,824 visitors,’ said spokesperson Julie Sargent.

Britain’s Tom Allen and Danielle Huskisson won two medals apiece at the 9th Cyprus International Swimming Marathon in Limassol – three of them gold. Camilla Hattersley, one of a five-strong Scotland team, and Britain’s Rachel Williams also swam their way on to the podium.

Allen was the double gold medallist, leading home a 36-strong field to win the men’s 5k race by the slimmest of margins in 58min 06.75sec. Mark Papp of Hungary was a mere 0.01sec behind.

Allen’s GB team-mate Thomas Sunter was fourth in 58:15.95 just ahead of Scotland’s Mark Deans (58:16.07) with Scott Deans of Scotland 10th in 59:21.84.

Twenty-four hours later Allen won the 10k race in 2:00:02.08, a second ahead of Papp, with Mark Deans fourth (2:00:05.18), Sunter fifth (2:00:19.56) and Scott Deans 10th (2:07:27.64).

Huskisson’s gold came in the women’s 10k which she won in 2:10:34.23, 41 seconds ahead of Hattersley (2:11:37.43) with Scotland’s Alyshia McCracken fourth (2:16:40.56).

Earlier Huskisson and Williams respectively took silver and bronze in the 5k race in 1:02:32.39 and 1:02:36.02 behind Hungary’s Flora Sibilan, whose winning time was 1:02:30.12.

Scotland’s Rebecca Smith and McCracken were seventh and eighth in 1:04:15.27 and 1:06:11.72.