

Ben planned epic 80km Lake Wakatipu swim – he lasted an amazing six hours in chilly waters

A BOUT of debilitating motion sickness foiled a North Islander's brave effort to be the first to swim the length of Lake Wakatipu.

Wellington-based Ben

Campbell-Macdonald had to be pulled from the water after six hours and 10 minutes, suffering from exhaustion and on the verge of hypothermia.

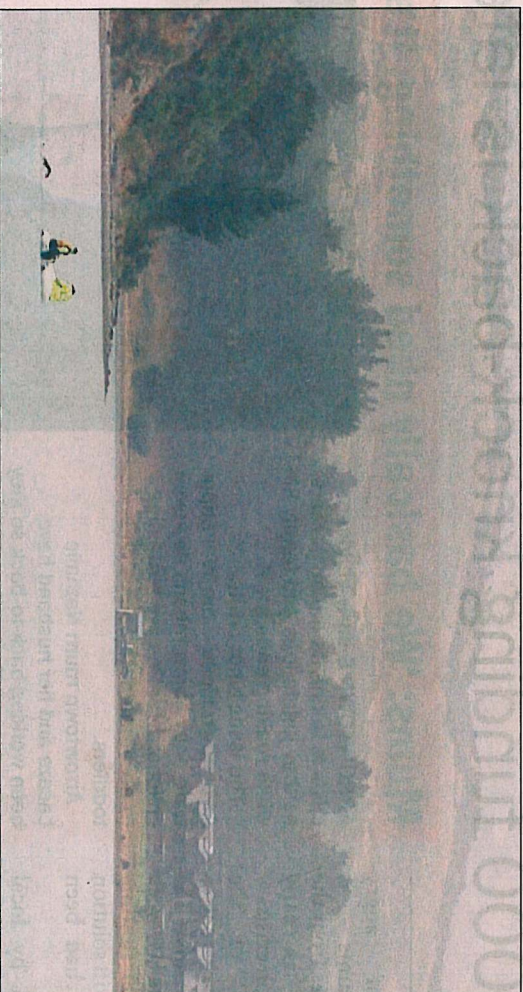
He left the Glenorchy wharf for Kingston on February 9 but was forced to give up 22km into the 80km journey – about 2km after Bennetts Bluff – when a form of seasickness made him violently ill.

But despite aborting his mission, the 28-year-old Ministry of Health worker is still believed to have spent a record time in the water. "Wakatipu is the longest lake in New Zealand and I was determined to be the first to swim it," says Campbell-Macdonald.

"If would have taken me up to 24 hours to do it and I was confident of pulling it off. I was going well until the sickness hit me and after that it was a struggle as I was vomiting for about 45 minutes.

"Waves had got up and started coming at me side-on and I was being tipped about. That's what did the damage."

To prepare for the challenge,



Water boy: Ben Campbell-Macdonald (above) and photographed during his record bid to swim Lake Wakatipu

Campbell-Macdonald had been swimming 100km a week for two months in Wellington Harbour.

On the day of the Lake Wakatipu marathon he wore two sets of thermals and a wetsuit and was smeared in petroleum jelly to help keep cold at bay as the water temperature was about 13.5degC.

He set off from Glenorchy at 7pm "to get the night out of the way first" and was accompanied by an inflatable rescue boat driven by mentor Philip Rush – a renowned former long-distance

swimmer and conqueror of Cook Strait – and support crew onboard Queenstowner Nigel Brown's launch, MV Luanda.

Along the way he was thrown bananas and energy bars and given warm Powerade and water to drink.

Although disappointed at not completing the task, Campbell-Macdonald says he'll give it another go – to raise awareness for the Swim For Life campaign run by Water Safety NZ. But only if he can first conquer

a motion sickness problem that's twice halted him from swimming the Cook Strait.

Local Tom Pryde, a veteran of multisport, is believed to have held the previous record for the length of time spent in Lake Wakatipu. A few years ago he was in the water for just under four hours during a 13km swim from Walter Peak to Queenstown.

"What Ben did is a pretty massive thing by anyone's standards," Pryde says.

- RUSSELL BLACKSTOCK