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One big idea connects 9 islands in 5 days ~ Sara Miles

‘**W**hat is he doing this for?’ is the question most people ask when I tell them about Sandor Csepregi’s *Southern Gulf Islands-athon*. ‘Local food security and sustainability,’ I reply.

I was camping with friends on Valdes Island, July 2, when Sandor came through on his awareness-raising trek through the islands. He was in good spirits and enjoyed a few laughs with us before tackling the logging roads on a borrowed bicycle.

This was after his departure from Browning Harbour, Pender Island, on Friday morning, July 1. Jay Raichura and Kelly-Anne B swam with Sandor to the Saturna Lamb Barbeque before he ran across Saturna and jumped in the water again for a swim to Mayne Island.

He cycled north to Miners Bay before swimming across Active Pass. Next, another cycling trip, up 30km-long Galiano Island this time. The bike got a flat tire, so he ran it the rest of the way. And this was all on Canada Day!

Saturday morning, Sandor swam Porlier Pass with Josh Landry providing boat support, landing safely on Valdes Island around 11am. I saw him shortly after that; he polished off a litre of Gatorade with no problem, before also enjoying a couple of glasses of red wine. The weather was pretty hot, so he stuck around our camp in the shade for awhile before making his way to the north end of Valdes for the night.

Stalwart sailors Tony Clark and Jacquie Main got up before dawn on Sunday to provide boat support for Sandor crossing Gabriola Passage. He said he could have done it on his own, he didn’t want to bother us at that hour, but we made sure someone would be there for him. Why he chose that time, I am not sure, but Victor Anthony was waiting for him on the other side with a Gabriola Green Bike.

‘It was pretty darn exciting!’ Victor said, although not many people wanted to be up that early on a Sunday. Sandor spent the day cycling Gabriola and meeting people interested in his cause and then made his way back to Valdes that night.

Monday, he departed from the west side of Valdes and swam to Thetis Island. He cycled around, then paddled a borrowed canoe to tiny Jackscrew Island.

On the last day of his epic journey, Tuesday, July 5, Sandor swam from Jackscrew to the north end of Salt Spring Island and cycled down to Beaver Point. He completed the last leg of his Gulf Islands-athon with a swim to his homeport, landing at Thieves Bay on Pender, with Brian Budnyk providing boat support. The tides were not in his favour this time, so he was pretty exhausted upon arriving, but full of smiles and thanks for all the people who helped him on his journey.

Observers have remarked on Sandor’s ‘corkscrew’ swim stroke, his love of red wine, his eccentricity and his energy. ‘My hat’s off to him,’ Victor Anthony said. ‘He is doing an excellent thing, it really raised some eyebrows, and he is getting people talking.’

Sandor is fundraising for local food initiatives, but the most remarkable part of this story is the desire to connect our small island communities that are separated by water—which, it turns out, is not much of an obstacle at all, if we follow Sandor’s example. And he plans to do it again, soon!

See members.shaw.ca/gulfislandsathon/links.htm for Sandor’s updated list of local food producers and sustainability initiatives on the islands. ☞

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