

## German to Swim Length of Pacific Coast

By Hannah Thompson  
Special to The Tico Times

**R**enate Herberger is determined to raise awareness of the harm being done to the endangered creatures of the ocean – so committed, in fact, that she is preparing to swim the length of the Costa Rican Pacific coast, more than 1,000 kilometers, to call attention to the problem.

Herberger, a German citizen living in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, will begin her extraordinary challenge Feb. 1 at Punta Burica on the border with Panama, and will swim eight hours a day, five days a week, for more than two months until she reaches her destination at Bahía Salinas on the Nicaraguan border.

“My project is about promoting gentler practices out at sea,” Herberger told The Tico Times in a phone interview. “So much life is lost through unsustainable and wasteful commercial fishing practices such as shark-finning, long-lining, trawling and drag-netting.”

Her aim with this swim is to promote marine sanctuaries to preserve threatened species of sharks, whales, dolphins and turtles, and to call for safer fishing methods.

Herberger, 52, has always felt a deep affinity and at-homeness in the ocean, learned from her mother at a young age.

But it was two years ago, after she suffered a massive thrombosis while waiting for surgery for a torn ligament in her knee, that swimming took on a new significance, becoming her only release from the constant discomfort she feels on land.

Swimming away the pain for hours at a time was “blissful, comfortable, magical, amazing,” she says, describing the sea as her therapist, healer and sanctuary. “The moment I am in the water, I feel at home. There is an instant sense of relief, freedom, of being one with the ‘big mother.’”

She decided to devote the rest of her life to the protection and preservation of the ocean, with swimming as her form of tranquil activism. And so the idea of a long swim began to evolve.

Herberger's love for Costa Rica began in May of last year, when she visited the country to compete in a long-distance race, and for a bit of adventure. On a visit to the Osa Peninsula, on the southern Pacific coast, she gazed across the Golfo Dulce and thought, “Oh my goodness, it looks so good. I want to do it!” Just 48 hours later, she swam the 22-kilometer distance in nine hours, trailed by

the media, two dolphins and a shark.

Two days later on a bus, she met Zeidy Jiménez from the Dominical Social Programs Association, an environmental protection organization. They kept in touch, and when, in September, Herberger had her far-out idea of a Pacific coast swim, Jiménez committed organizational support immediately.

Herberger believes this is the first time anyone has attempted this swim – not that she's interested in breaking any records.

“This is a contemplative swim, not a competitive swim,” she says.

She appears entirely undaunted by what will be a phenomenal test of physical endurance and mental toughness.

“Swimming is no effort for me,” she says with a laugh. “That swim across the Golfo Dulce cost me no energy. I was ecstatic, in a state of sheer bliss. In fact, I had more energy



Photos courtesy of Renate Herberger



**Coast Crawler:** Renate Herberger, 52, plans to enter the water Feb. 1 and swim Costa Rica's entire Pacific coast to raise awareness of harm being done to marine life. Left, Herberger will stop every half-hour for water and other drinks and every hour for a snack.

crew to accompany Herberger – essential for her safety – and are appealing to boat owners along the Pacific coast, including fishermen, who may be able to offer their boat for a day, week or month. They are also looking for offers of accommodation along the coast and space for the workshops.

Herberger remains serene and composed in the face of these difficulties. She has faith in divine providence that this journey is meant to be, she says, and that the right people will appear at the right time to make it possible.

“What gives me inner strength is this phenomenal faith and trust,” she says. “What is not yet in place will come to be. I know inside myself that we will pull it off.” ■

coming out of the water than when I went in.”

The indefatigable Herberger will run workshops in eco-dance therapy during her few moments out of the water. A dance therapist by profession, her idea is to take dance and movement therapy into outdoor spaces, even the sea, to give participants an emotional and spiritual experience of connecting with natural elements.

“I want people to connect with nature in a deep way that inspires them to defend it,” she says.

Her reserves of strength run deep, though she has no intention of struggling or taking unnecessary risks on her journey. She will listen to local advice about currents, weather

conditions and, of course, the possibility of dangerous sharks. Remarkably, but true to character, she feels no sense of danger.

“The ocean is in charge,” she says. “And I humbly ask its permission and trust in it to keep me safe. Even when I'm alone in the ocean for eight hours at a time, I'm never afraid or lonely.”

She describes being in the water as an act of meditation – a mental state of total openness and quietude. She jokes that the swim will be the easy part of the journey.

She could be right. Completely volunteer-run and not-for-profit, the project is seriously short of funds and in need of support. As yet, they haven't found a boat for a support

### How to Help

If you want to support Herberger with a donation or can offer a boat or accommodation for the team along the route, visit [www.costricamermaid.net](http://www.costricamermaid.net), where you'll also be able to read updates of her progress, or e-mail [renate\\_herberger@yahoo.com](mailto:renate_herberger@yahoo.com) or [apsdominical@gmail.com](mailto:apsdominical@gmail.com).

### INSIDE

Andean Master Pays First Visit to C.R.



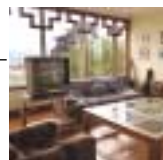
Page W3 ▶

Film to Chronicle Monteverde's History



Page W4 ▶

San José Hostel Offers Family Hospitality



Page W6 ▶

TNT Theatre Returns With 'Midsummer'



Page W12 ▶