

## Sumidero Canyon - FINA Grand Prix 15km

Nadine Williams and Coach Chris Nelson left on April 12 for the city of Tuxtla Gutierrez, Mexico for an Open Water event near the southern-most border of Mexico. The town is in the state of Chiapas, and is entirely inland. The 15-km swim was to take place in a dammed river within the Sumidero Canyon near the city.

The Sumidero Canyon and dam are spectacular attractions, once nominated to be the 8th wonder of the modern world. The cliffs of the canyon rise over a kilometer high on either side of the river and in many places enter the water completely straight, with no river banks at all. The river can be as narrow as 30m, which only magnifies the unbelievable height of the walls.

Also star attractions to the canyon are the many forms of wildlife. Of particular interest to the swimmers were the crocodiles and vultures. In 21 years of running this competition, no one could remember seeing the crocodiles within the canyon itself, but this year on our visit to the venue one day before the race we spotted no less than 5 crocodiles, one of which was swimming only 400m from the starting point of the race.

Luckily, organizers changed the starting point for the next morning, and in doing so changed the end of the route to extend the race to 16.5-km, albeit with no crocodiles (a worth-while trade off). The swimmers would still travel approximately 2-km through possible crocodile territory, but at the early start time of the race it was deemed safe to proceed.

The greatest challenge of open water swimming is sticking to the pack, especially when it challenges by picking up the pace. The field included Olympic swimmers and World Champions, and Nadine was the youngest competitor by three years. Experience plays a big factor in super-distance swims, and you would have to see one live to understand just how much effort and determination it takes to be at the front of the race.

Nadine had a terrific race. She held with the front of the pack, racing for nearly 1 hour in the top-4 positions, and sticking with the pack as swimmers fell off the back. Her determination was evident, and Canada's National Open Water coach praised her effort saying it was her best ever open water performance, topping her swim last year at World Championships in Rome. Nadine finished the race in 9th place - the top Canadian female in the event. Way to go, Dini!

For the national story of this event, go to [www.swimming.ca](http://www.swimming.ca).

Coach Chris also plans to update his blog with some pictures and video of the event, so stay tuned as this may take a couple more days to prepare.