The Big River Man

Long-distance swimmer Martin Strel was born in Slovenia on 1st Oct 1954. As a child he had always wanted to become a gymnast but then he grew too big. His coach used to tell him he was a born swimmer, so Strel decided to follow his advice and take up swimming. Now he swims the longest rivers in the world to raise awareness for clean water. His motto is: 'Swimming for peace, friendship and clean waters.' He has swum the entire length of the Mississippi, the Danube and the Yangtze, and in 2007, he became the first person to swim almost the entire length of the Amazon. [1]

Amazonian people don't swim in the Amazon if they can avoid it. Apart from being extremely polluted, it is home to some very nasty creatures: piranhas, electric eels, stingrays, anacondas, poisonous snakes, crocodiles and giant catfish. Even bull sharks. But perhaps the most vicious of all is a little fish called the candiru, which gets inside your body and feeds off your blood. [2]

But in spite of the dangers, on the morning of 1st February 2007, in Atalaya in Peru, Strel walked bravely into the water. It had been raining hard overnight, which was good news, as it would make the current flow faster and help him on his way. To protect him from the candiru, he was wearing a wetsuit, but that would not work against other dangers in the water. [3]

For the next 66 days, Strel would swim for hours, all day every day, with a short break for lunch and a few hours of sleep on the boat at night. The water was black and murky. He could hardly see his arm in front of him.

As he was swimming, he would have imaginary conversations with his daughter, so that he didn't think too much about what might be lurking in the water below him. [4]

In the end, one of the biggest problems was not anything actually in the water, but what was above him. It had been raining non-stop for days, causing the worst flooding in the Amazon for 100 years. Tarantulas, scorpions, millipedes, ants and wasps were knocked off the leaves on the trees and fell into the water where they stung him. And if that wasn't enough, large black birds attacked his face and the sun burnt him so badly that he had to wear a pillowcase over his head, with slits for his eyes and mouth for protection. [5]

But finally, on 7th April 2007, after a gruelling journey, Strel crossed the finishing line at Ponta De Pedras in Brazil. He was completely exhausted but he had completed what was possibly the longest and most dangerous swim in human history. [6]

1.Six sentences have been removed from the article. Complete the gaps with sentences A-G. There is one extra sentence which you do not need.

A Piranha would be able to bite through it easily.

B He had made it.

C He looked very strange but he didn't care.

D This strategy helped keep them away.

E It's called the vampire fish for a good reason.

F It would be a journey of 5,268 kilometres.

G If he did that he was in danger of giving up.

Drag the letters here:

1. _____ **| 2.** _____ **|3.** _____ **|4.** _____

5. _____ **| 6.** _____

2. Are these sentences True or False?

1. Martin Strel swims for the sheer pleasure of it. T / F

2. Amazonian people don't swim in the Amazon because of the fast currents. T / F

3. The recent heavy rainfall was both an advantage and a disadvantage for Martin. T / F

4. His wetsuit protected him from the very worst threat in the water. T / F

5. Martin would imagine what was in the water to distract himself from swimming. T / F

6. His face was burnt by the sun, stung by insects and attacked by birds. T / F

7. Martin had no energy left when he completed the swim T / F

VERB ZONE

GIVE UP **COPE WITH** **KEEP UP**

SET OUT **TAKE ON**

Match the verbs with the definitions

1. Decide to do something challenging
2. Stop doing something when it becomes difficult
3. Start a journey
4. Maintain or continue to do something
5. Deal with a difficulty successfully

Drag the phrasal verbs above to the right space.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Choose the option that best completes the sentence.

1 Christopher Columbus ... on his first voyage across the Atlantic in 1492.

Set out / coped with / took on

2 I was finding my classes easy so I decided to ... some extra work.

Cope with / take on / keep up

3 She never considered ... , even when she was cold and hungry.

Setting out / coping with / giving up

4 How can I ... my French during the holidays? I don't want to forget it!

Take on / keep up / cope with

5 What's the most difficult problem you've had to ... ?

Take on / give up / cope with