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International Swimmers Attempt to Cross Freezing Lake Baikal in Eco-Relay

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Eight marathon swimmers from Europe, Africa and the United States shed their wetsuits for the two-day relay swim. **AIST-TV / TASS**

Eight swimmers from around the world braved the freezing waters of Lake Baikal in Siberia this week to raise awareness toward the environmental threats facing the world's largest and oldest freshwater lake.

Lake Baikal, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has been plagued with environmental problems caused by industrial pollution, mining, sewage discharge and agricultural run-off. Its latest threat comes from a law signed by President Vladimir Putin last August that effectively permits clear-cutting of trees in specially protected natural areas in order to build or upgrade transport infrastructure.

Embed:

> Пловцы со всего мира устроили экозаплыв на Байкале, чтобы спасти озеро. Спортсмены проплыли 70 километров в ледяной воде без гидрокостюмов
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> Достойный поступок ◙ pic.twitter.com/fyMVQ6Fnp4
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> — Лента.ру (@lentaruofficial) July 15, 2021

On Monday, the eight marathon swimmers from Europe, Africa and the United States shed their wetsuits for a two-day relay swim to cross Lake Baikal and the Angara River, intending to cross 120 kilometers.

But the race had to be cut short at 70 kilometers due to water temperatures plunging as low as 9 degrees Celsius (48 Fahrenheit).

“It was hard,” said Andrei Bugay, who organized and participated in the third annual event dubbed the Baikal Great Swim.

“We didn't have time to recover ... nothing helps, neither sauna nor hot shower, we were shaking and shivering, then falling into the water and swimming,” The Associated Press quoted Bugay as saying.

The two previous swims — with and without wetsuits — covered 55 kilometers.

“I wish that we would have made it to the other side, but it was the best adventure with the best team that I could ever hope for,” said U.S. swimmer Jamie Monahan.

Video published by Reuters showed the eight athletes crossing the finish line in the Eastern Siberian city of Irkutsk one day after starting in the village of Vydrino.

The news agency reported that the swimmers from France, Italy, South Africa and Morocco, as well as the U.S. and Russia, had spent about 26 hours in the water with short pauses in a dinghy.

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