

## **EXTRACT: FANTASTIC FEMALE ADVENTURERS**

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### **6. BETH FRENCH: The Water Baby Who Grew Up to Be a Mermaid**

*Swimming the world's oceans*

In December 2016, Beth went to Hawaii for her second swim, crossing the Molokai Channel. She remembers the night-time part of the swim best. 'The water was warm and dark and my arms had this green-blue glow,' she says. 'There were sparkles spiralling off my fingertips and beneath me were glowing blue squid and fish. My support crew, Mike, was kayaking next to me and the bottom of his boat and paddle were glowing as well! It was caused by phosphorescence from plankton – tiny creatures in the water that give off light when they are disturbed. It was magical.'

After a while, Beth stopped and floated on her back to take a break, watching the night sky twinkle with a billion stars. Instead of handing over her drink, Mike said, 'Beth, I don't want to worry you, but there's a shark behind you!'

He shone his head torch into the water. Beth saw a pointed grey fin and froze. She could make out stripes beneath the water's surface: it was a man-eating tiger shark!

Quickly, Beth moved into an upright position by treading water. 'I'd read that if you encounter a shark, you should make sure that you don't look like a fish so it won't want to eat you!' The shark swam lazily beneath them and she pulled her knees up to get away from it. The shark was longer than the kayak! Desperately, Mike flashed his torch at the support boat to get it to come back.

It felt like forever, but it was about ten minutes before the boat turned around and sailed towards them. This scared the shark away. Beth had been in the ocean for ten hours and still had five hours of swimming in darkness ahead of her. She was terrified because she could not see what was in the water beneath her. There could be anything lurking in that black water ...