

US Woman Attempts 60-Hour Swim To Cuba

An American woman has taken the plunge to fulfil a lifelong dream - swimming for 60 hours from Cuba to the Florida Keys across shark-infested waters.

Diana Nyad set off from Havana on Sunday evening in a bid to become the first person to swim over to the Florida Straits.

The 61-year-old hopes to complete the swim without the aid of a shark cage - instead using an electrical field to protect her.

Ms Nyad, who has been training in the open seas of the Caribbean, expressed confidence before she set off.

She said the still air and flat water were perfect conditions for her attempt to make the 103-mile (166km) journey.

"So now I'm almost 62 years old and I'm standing here at the prime of my life," she said.

"Now I look out at a flat calm, so I think this is my day."

Ms Nyad thanked several dozen well-wishers who came to see her before she plunged into the sea.

She swam away just before sunset, escorted by kayaks and several larger boats carrying her support team.

Earlier on Sunday, Ms Nyad said it has been a lifelong dream and she hoped her experience would inspire others to live vigorously during their golden years.

She said the attempt was a symbolic moment for increasing understanding between the United States and Cuba, two nations torn by five decades of animosity and mistrust.

Five boats are sailing alongside the endurance swimmer with 45 support crew on board, from navigators, nutritionists and doctors to shark wranglers and a film crew that has been documenting her story. Ms Nyad on her way to Florida after setting off from Havana

Ms Nyad first attempted the crossing as a 28-year-old back in 1978, when she swam inside a steel shark cage for about 42 hours before strong sea currents forced her to abandon her efforts.

This time, Ms Nyad will be relying on special equipment that surrounds her - with an electric current imperceptible to humans but strong enough to keep most sharks at bay.

However, whitetip sharks are not deterred by the field, so divers will be standing by to gently discourage any of those who get curious, without harming them.

For the record to be considered valid, Ms Nyad has to swim without a wetsuit.

Her crew will navigate, monitor her health and provide nourishment.

However, she is not allowed to touch the boat and helpers are not allowed to hold her until she emerges fully onto dry land.