

A History of the Catalina Channel Swims

Since 1927

by  
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Revised 2012, 1996, 1994, 1988

### **Abstract**

The purpose of the book is to develop a history of the swimming crossings of the Catalina Channel since the first swim was completed in 1927.

On January 15, 1927 George Young won the Wrigley Ocean Marathon swim across the Catalina Channel in 15 hours, 44 minutes, and 30 seconds. Within three months of the Wrigley Ocean Marathon, four swimmers successfully tackled the Catalina Channel.

Between 1927 and 1952 only two men conquered the Channel, but from 1952 to 1958 eleven swimmers crossed the Channel. Numerous attempts were made between 1958 and 1970 but none were successful. In the early 1970's and again in the late 1970's, the men's and women's speed records were rewritten. There were twenty-nine crossings by seventeen swimmers in the 1970's. From 1980 through 1989 there were thirty two individual crossings and twelve relay crossings. The book is further broken into the following sections from 1990 to 1999; 2000 to 2004; 2005 to 2007;2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; Around the Island swims and 2012.

In 2011 the overall relay record was broken and in 2012 the women's record and overall record from Catalina to the mainland was smashed. Numerous records were broken, especially that of the oldest person to swim the Catalina Channel (which was broken three times) and the relay record. From 1927 through the 2012 season there were two hundred and fifty-one (251) people who swam Catalina.

#### **The following conclusions were reached:**

1. The 1927 Wrigley Ocean Marathon swim began the long history of Channel swimming in the United States.
2. In the end of 2012 there had been eighty-five relay crossings and two hundred and fifty-one people swam the Catalina Channel.
3. Female swimmers have been as successful as male swimmers in crossing and setting records for the Catalina Channel.
4. Age is a determinant of speed in swimming the Catalina Channel.
5. The establishment of the Catalina Channel Swimming Federation has aided in the development and furtherance of the Catalina crossing and its history.
6. Pool swimming and the inception of the marathon team aided in development of marathon swimmers in the 1970's.
7. The Catalina Channel swim is comparable to the English Channel in conditions, difficulty, distance, and challenge to the swimmer.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

On Tuesday, August 23, 1875 after being in the water 21 hours and 45 minutes, Matthew Webb stepped ashore in Calais, France. He was the first person to swim the English Channel successfully. Instantly, he became a hero.<sup>1</sup> The challenge, the mystique, and the possibility of instant fame from swimming the Channel began to attract marathon swimmers from all over the world.

In the summer of 1926, Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel. She also broke the existing record set in 1923 by Enrico Tiraboschi of 16 hours and 33 minutes, by completing the distance in 14 hours and 39 minutes. Overnight she became a celebrity; New York even honored her with a ticker tape parade.<sup>2</sup>

On the other side of the country one of the interested observers was William Wrigley, Jr. Ederle's swim and all the publicity she received intrigued him. He decided to put on the Wrigley Catalina Island Swim. To insure numerous entrants from all over the world, he offered a \$25,000 purse, winner take all. The race, on January 15, 1927, would go from Avalon to the breakwater at Point Vicente, a promontory landmark on the California coast. The straight line distance of the Catalina, or San Pedro Channel, was twenty-two miles, one mile further than the famous English Channel.

Wading into the chilly waters destined for the mainland were 102 swimmers, 87 men and 15 women. Of these, only one entrant completed the crossing. The swim was very successful, not only in publicity and also financially for Wrigley and the Island, but it touched off a new craze in marathon swimming. There was another Channel for marathon swimmers to conquer. It was no longer necessary for them to travel to England with the Catalina Channel in their backyard. Whether for the challenge or the preparation, swimming Catalina has become as important as swimming the English Channel to such top marathon swimmers as Florence Chadwick, Greta Andersen, Tom Park, Lynne Cox, and Penny Lee Dean, John York, Karen Burton,, Chad Hundebly, Pete Huisveld, Todd Robinson and Grace Van Der Byl.

The record dropped from 15 hours and 44 minutes to 7 hours and 15 minutes set by Penny Lee Dean in 1976. Since the 1927 swim, two hundred fifty other swimmers have successfully braved the treacherous Channel, bringing the total number of successful aspirants to two hundred and fifty-one.

#### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this book is to develop a history of the swimming crossings of the Catalina Channel since the first swim was completed in 1927.

#### **Significance of the Work**

The Catalina Channel is the only major channel crossing on the American continent which compares to the English Channel in both distance and difficulty. Furthermore, very little has been written on marathon swimming and even less on the Catalina crossing. The specifics of the crossings of these two hundred fifty-one athletes needed to be recorded before their contributions were lost. This work will enable present and future generations to see by whom and when the Catalina Channel was crossed and what these crossings entailed.

### **Definition of Terms**

Catalina Channel: The San Pedro Channel, as it is officially named, is the 22 miles of ocean separating the Island of Catalina from Point Vicente, a promontory landmark on the California coast.

Marathon Swimming: The art of swimming continuously a minimum of ten miles in any kind of open water (lake, river, sea, etc.). It is permitted to grease the body before a swim, use goggles, wear a cap, ear plugs, and a bathing suit. However, no artificial aid of any kind is allowed nor is any physical contact by another person allowed.

### **Methods and Procedures**

To gather information necessary for this work, the materials available on the two hundred fifty-one successful crossers was collected at the following libraries: California State Polytechnic University at Pomona; California State University at Long Beach; Honnold Library, Pomona College, Claremont; Long Beach Public Library system; Los Angeles Public Library system; Cabrillo Museum, San Pedro; the Avalon Museum, Catalina Island and the Catalina Channel Swimming Federation logs and interviews.

An attempt was made to contact one outstanding athlete who successfully completed the crossing from each of the following selective chronological periods: the early 1950's, the late 1950's, the early 1970's, the late 1970's, the early 1980's, the middle 1980's, the early 1990's, the late 1990's 2000-2004; 2005-2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; Around the Island; 2012 swims. Florence Chadwick, Greta Andersen, Lynne Cox, Frank Reynolds, John York, Dan Slosberg and Pete Huisveld, Todd Robinson, Hank Wise, and Grace Van Der Byl were some of the swimmers who were interviewed. Other swimmers interviewed included Pam Nickle, Ray Falk, Al Guth, Mike Suttle, Dave Clark, Richard Marks, Pat Hines, Kalani Russell, Suzanne Riedinger and Dale Petranech. The interviews also included people such as friends, coaches, and navigators. Chuck Slocombe, aide on Florence Chadwick's swim; John Olguin, Benny Nawahi's coach; John Sonnichsen, Greta Andersen and Lynne Cox's coach, Syndi Goldenson, a successful crosser and the coach of Orca; Siga Albrecht, original coach of Orca; Chuck Liddell, historian, Catalina Island; Richard Yeo, The Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Marathon Swimming Chairman 1976-1978; and Mickey Pittman, one of the navigators, were interviewed.

These people were located and personal interviews were used to collect material as it related to the swimmers' contributions to marathon swimming. Interviews were conducted personally or by telephone, and the material obtained was analyzed as to its relevancy to the work. Many extraneous items came up in the interviews which had nothing to do with the development of this publication. Information was then combined with the available literature. Further, the private newspaper collections of Richard Yeo, Chuck Liddell, John York, and Penny Lee Dean were used extensively. The author relied heavily on personal knowledge and acquaintances derived through forty-two years of local, national, and international competition and coaching in marathon swimming.

Once all material was gathered, it was critically analyzed regarding its relevance to the work, and then it was organized into an understandable and readable form.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **The Eighties: 1980-1989**

In the Eighties there were nearly as many crossings as the entire period between 1927-1979. Thirty-two individual and twelve relay swims were completed. Better training methods, navigation and navigational instruments as well as the establishment and control of the Catalina Channel Swimming Federation, (CCSF) assisted in the numerous successes and records.

The era is divided into three sections: 1980 through 1984, 1985 through 1987, and 1988 through 1989. From 1980 to 1984, there were twenty-one individual swims and six relay crossings. In 1981, the Catalina Channel Swimming Federation was formed. This period of swims culminated with the first International Catalina Channel race. The middle Eighties, 1985-1987, has seen the domination of older swimmers. Three different men have broken the oldest record and two relays of six men over the age of sixty have completed swims successfully. The swims of John York and Frank Reynolds will be highlighted for the Eighties. In the late Eighties, 1988-1989, there were two successful individual swims and four relay crossings. The United States National team set the fastest relay record in 7 hours, 2 minutes and 45 seconds.

#### **The Early Eighties**

The first swimmer of the Eighties was Kalani Russell. On Friday, August 1, the Los Alamitos swim instructor entered the warm water on Catalina accompanied by teammate Laura Windell. The two women swam for the Seal Beach Swim Club, coached by Mark Nielson and Ross McIntyre. For a year and a half Kalani had trained in both the pool and ocean for the swim. Kalani had been swimming ocean races since she was eight years old. She first thought of swimming Catalina when her fellow teammates made the crossing in 1971. This was intriguing to her even though she was only nine.

The first few hours of the swim were very difficult as Laura kept stopping. Kalani had to tread water waiting for Laura. Finally Laura was pulled from the water at about ten miles. This served as a motivator for Kalani. She had to do well as she was the only swimmer remaining.

At the beginning of the swim she was given clam chowder and crackers to eat. This attracted too many fish for Kalani's wishes. For the rest of the swim she didn't eat or drink very much. When she did, she drank ERG and ate crackers.

Kalani was doing well until she hit the three mile mark off the mainland. The water temperature drop was so severe Kalani tucked her knees under her body trying to stay warm. The current was pushing her south. For every stroke she took she drifted twice as far. Kalani became frustrated. A chocolate candy bar in the last mile was able to motivate her through the current. Twelve hours and two minutes after she began Kalani walked ashore.

Within three weeks of Kalani's swim, fifteen year old Bill Kincheloe swam the channel. His course differed from past swims as Marineland would no longer allow anyone to land on their property. Bill began at Long Point on Catalina and landed at Cabrillo Beach, approximately an additional half mile swim. When the current runs in this direction, to the north, this can be a faster swim. Unfortunately, the current is not

predictable.

Bill's swim took twelve hours and two minutes. Conditions were far from ideal. "It was the wrong day to swim,"<sup>1</sup> according to Bill. There was a fair amount of chop. It did not matter, however, as Bill's two years of training with Orca ocean club, coached by Syndi Goldenson, carried him across the Channel.

Bill was the first of three Orca swimmers to attempt the Catalina Channel in 1980. Teammate Carol Hadley waded into the water just five days after Bill's swim, on August 19. Conditions were fine and the swim went well. Carol swam from Doctor's Cove to Cabrillo Beach. According to coach Goldenson, Carol was very positive throughout the swim, and just had a good time. In 1979 Carol had been a crew member on Tami Lavacheck's crossing. She thought it was a fantastic adventure and wanted to do it herself. Carol had completed her sophomore year at Occidental College where she was majoring in Sports Medicine. Her collegiate swimming career was cut short due to a left shoulder and elbow problem. Carol worked on it for a year in preparation for the Catalina swim. She had some pain in the crossing but no major effects afterwards. Carol fulfilled her dream and became the third successful swimmer of 1980.

Throughout the year in 1980 a group of interested swimmers, paddlers, coaches, navigators, and others had been meeting to organize a Catalina Channel Swimming Federation (CCSF). After a year of planning and developing the rules were ratified in January of 1981. Penny Lee Dean was elected president.

The purpose of the federation was to promote the swimming of the Catalina Channel. In addition, the federation was in charge of observing and authenticating the swims, furnishing information, advising those intending to make a swim, and maintaining records of the Catalina Channel crossings.

CCSF maintains records for the fastest crossing, the youngest and oldest in each direction for both individual and relays. The federation presents each successful swimmer with a medallion and certificate of completion at the annual awards banquet held in November. In May of 1981 the federation sponsored a clinic to provide information and assistance to marathon swimmers. Over forty athletes attended. It was a huge success.

The 1981 swim season also began in world record fashion. A group of swimmers from the Santa Monica Masters decided to swim a relay across the Channel. It was the first relay attempt since 1926. A relay is composed of six members rotating each hour in order, until the swim is completed. The relay included three men and three women. They were Richard Marks, Pat Hines, Louise Comar, Linda Terris, Brian Murphy, and Harold Johnson. All but one was experienced ocean swimmers and all were strong pool swimmers.

It was an ideal day for a crossing, with calm seas and limited wind. Surprisingly, for a mid-June day, the water temperature was 68 degrees near Catalina, and only dropped to 62 degrees near Marineland. The crossing went well except for a slight scare when two sharks were sighted.

The relay's time of eight hours fifty-nine minutes set a new world record and held for numerous years. Three of the relay members went on to individual crossings, two of which were in 1981.

After the successful relay crossing and fine performances at the Seal Beach 10

miler, Richard Marks and Pat Hines decided to attempt individual crossings. What made this unique was they decided to swim together but with separate boats. The two extended their training from mid-July until the end of August for the swim.

The swim was supposed to begin before midnight on the thirtieth but small craft warnings delayed the start. Finally at 2 a.m. on Sunday, the 31st, Richard, a 32 year old lawyer and Pat, a 26 year old radio executive, decided to go anyway. Both were expected to work on Monday.

The crossing was very rough. Everyone on board was seasick. The strong currents and high winds pushed them many miles off course. As the hours wore on the lack of preparation began to take its toll. Richard's right shoulder began to throb. Improper nourishment of sandwiches, soup, and water had an effect. The two separated the last few miles and Pat swam on ahead. The severe temperature drop off of Marineland due to the upwelling currents had a further affect on Richard. He did not falter, however. "These last three miles were harder than any of the three Ironman contests or cross mountain bike races I have been in."<sup>2</sup> Richard completed the swim in eleven hours, twenty-eight minutes, just over ten minutes behind Pat. Both recovered quickly and went to work Monday morning.

In the 1981 season there had been two successful individual crossings and a world record setting relay. There would be six swims in 1982.

Louise Comar, a 27 year old deputy district attorney tackled the Channel on August 10, 1982. After being on the record setting relay in 1981, Comar decided to brave an individual crossing. "I really look at it as an adventure for everyone who is on the boat or swimming with me and it will be an adventure for me."<sup>3</sup> Lynne Cox served as Louise's coach. She trained up to fifteen miles a day in preparation for the swim.

The crossing began at Long Point on Catalina. Comar was swimming about two miles an hour. In mid channel she ran into a current which pushed her north. Gradually she drifted two miles off course. Late in the swim Louise's shoulder began to ache. The last two miles were the toughest. Louise had slowed to three quarters of a mile an hour in the 62 degrees water off of Royal Palm Beach. Eleven hours, fifty-nine minutes after she began Louise crawled up the rocky beach. She was in good spirits and stated "I feel great. After about 6 1/2 hours I felt I could make it all the way. At the end, however, I was trying to get out as fast as I could."<sup>4</sup>

The second swim of the summer was accomplished by Norm Albert. Albert, a 24 year old Air Force lieutenant, aborted an attempt at the channel in 1980. "I started to talk myself out of it like two and one half hours into it. The elbow problem started me worrying, but the elbow problem went away. It was just one of these pains that's with you for an hour and a half... and then I started thinking, 'Why do I want to be in the water seven or eight more hours?'"<sup>5</sup> He breezed through the channel on August 26 in 1982. Norm swam from Catalina to the mainland in eleven hours, twenty-five minutes, erasing a two year old debt.

The first amputee to complete a crossing was Tom Clardy on September 24. In 1971 while officer Clardy was giving a car a ticket he was sideswiped by another car and lost his leg. Courage was Tom's middle name. He took up one-legged skiing then returned to the water in 1978. Tom had been a frogman in the service. For three years he had wanted to swim Catalina but poor weather conditions and lack of finances had

prevented him. Coached by Penny Lee Dean, Tom trained all year for the crossing. His stroke count ranged from 65 strokes per minute at the beginning to 54 near the end of the swim. Tom ate sandwiches and drank apple juice on the crossing. After fourteen hours and two minutes, Tom crutched ashore on Cabrillo Beach to a crowd and a 15-foot greeting sign. Tom's complete swim was videotaped by a Christian T.V. station.

The final swim of the summer was by Jim McConica. On October 26 the former U.S.C. swim captain set out from Catalina for the mainland. It rained more than a third of the crossing. McConica feasted on milk and chocolate chip cookies. As the night wore on, the water temperature dropped to 60 degrees. Jim began to slip into hypothermia. He had an excellent crossing of nine hours, eight minutes and vowed to return in better shape in 1983.

In May, 1983 the first all women's relay team opened the season. The six women swimmers were from Pomona College. These included junior Kayleen Holloway, senior Jackie Huffman, freshman Cherie Monell, freshman Liane Stevenson, senior Jessica Webster and sophomore Amanda Wright. The idea of swimming a relay came about indirectly. Three of the athletes, who had swum various ocean races, were interested in individual swims across the Catalina Channel. The women felt a relay would be a good experience and preparation for the individual swim. As the women were from all over the U. S. the swim was planned for the week after graduation. This had a big effect as the water temperature in May was 58 degrees and conditions were not favorable. The team began from Long Point on May 18. It was a rough crossing with severe chop. Everyone on the boat was sick. Each swimmer went once, while four swam twice. Jessica Webster ran up Cabrillo Beach nine hours fifty-three minutes after the start.

The first individual swim was accomplished by Norm Albert on August 15th. Norm decided to swim a longer course in 1983. He became the first to swim from Cabrillo Beach to Avalon-over twenty-six miles. Other than experiencing some rain the swim was rather uneventful. Norm was accompanied by a coed relay team from the El Segundo Masters. The members included Brian Cohn, Reynold Kalstrom, Kim Shorkley, Karen Kinaman, Mike Greenburg, and Margaret Warner. Two boats served as escorts. As the relay pulled ahead of Norm the two boats separated. The relay finished in twelve hours, twenty-two minutes. By the time Norm reached Avalon over two thousand people waited on the shore to greet him. Two on the Town television show videotaped the entire swim of fifteen and a half hours.<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by the record setting pace of the 1983 season, Jim McConica reflected on the shore at Cherry Cove on Catalina, determined to set the record in his upcoming crossing. In 1982 he learned the nuances of marathon swimming and the mistakes he had made. Jim trained a year with coach Sandy Nielson for the swim. Jim had one paddler, Tom Dore, who paddled the complete crossing with him. His feeding breaks lasted no longer than ten seconds, and the navigator, Jim Herrin, took a Loran C reading every twelve minutes.<sup>7</sup> This enabled the navigator to keep Jim on an accurate course and to adjust for the drift immediately. In all the past swims when the Loran was used readings might have been taken on the hour and on rare occasions on the half hour. Every second that could have been saved was saved. Jim shattered the men's record of eight hours forty-nine minutes and broke the women's and overall record in that direction by six minutes. His time was eight hours, twenty-seven minutes. Jim collapsed at the finish

from exhaustion. After a few days of rest he was fine. It was an outstanding swim.

The final swim of 1983 was by Pam Nickle of San Pedro. The 31 year old had completed the Seal Beach 10 mile race in a respectable time in late July. Pam had been thinking about swimming Catalina but thought 1984 would be a more reasonable timetable. A sponsor availed her the opportunity to attempt the swim in 1983, however. Pam chose Lynne Cox as her trainer with the understanding that if Cox did not think she could make it Pam would not make the attempt.

Pam was enthusiastic and energetic. She looked for the positive in every situation. "I said before the swim that of all my apprehensions, swimming to daylight was the biggest, but starting off in the dark was my most favorite part of the whole thing. There was so much fluorescence in the water off Catalina Island that as I took each stroke little green sparks were coming off my fingertips. It was really euphoric."<sup>8</sup>

Within the first few hours of her swim Pam's shoulder gave out. For over thirteen hours she struggled with only the use of one arm. Pam did not complain. Her husband, Sparky, helped her make it despite the pain. Luckily, the water conditions were perfect and the temperature was in the upper 60's. After fifteen hours, thirty-eight minutes Pam ran up the shore at Cabrillo Beach. She had made it. It was over two months before she could lift her arm, however.

1983 was one of the most successful years for Channel crossings. The individual record from the Island to the mainland was rewritten by Jim McConica, the first all women's relay swim was made, the first coed relay from the mainland to Catalina occurred, and the longest mainland to Catalina individual swim happened.

In September of 1983 the Catalina Channel Swimming Federation finalized plans for an International race across the Catalina Channel. United States Swimming acted as cosponsor of the event. The course was set at 25.5 miles beginning at the Isthmus, finishing at Cabrillo Beach paralleling the 1927 swim.

For the Catalina race one hundred and fifty people were transported to Catalina Island on Sunday, August 19. The athletes were housed at the U.S.C. marine station in private rooms. There were two large tents with cots and blankets set up to house the support personnel. The support personnel included CCSF observers, coaches, paddlers, boat captains and boat crews with thirteen boats, numerous foreign dignitaries, the press, safety personnel and some spectators.

Sunday evening there was a barbecue for everyone. At about eight p.m. the athletes were transported to the marine station for the evening.

At 4 a.m. on Monday the thirteen athletes were awakened, fed and taken to the beach at the Isthmus for the start. Four men, three women and an International Relay consisting of three Egyptians, two Americans and a Czechoslovakian, lined up for the start. The field was very impressive. The U.S. team consisted of John York, a 23 year old swim coach and holder of three Catalina Channel records, the most impressive being the sixteen plus hour double crossing, Carol Lee-Heltzel a 29 year old dental technician who had crossed the English Channel and Rick Heltzel a 27 year old construction manager from Hawaii who had won the U.S. 16 mile trials. The team was coached by Penny Lee Dean. She was assisted by Dale Petranec, Siga Albrecht and Syndi Goldenson.

The English team consisted of two swimmers. David Morgan, 20, had crossed

Loch Ness and at 13 had been the youngest to cross the English Channel. Allison Streeter, 19, had swum various single crossings and was the youngest to complete a double crossing of the English Channel. Both were very experienced. The English team was coached by Charlie Gravett and assisted by Mr. Morgan and Mrs. Streeter.

The Egyptian team also had two swimmers, Mohamed Ibrahim Elwakeel and Lamiaa Zahy. Mohammed was a 16 year old student who had competed in races up to thirty miles in length. Lamiaa, 23, had won the Nile 20 mile race and numerous other Egyptian races. The Egyptian team had two coaches and a fifteen member support staff.

The international relay consisted of Jaroslav Novak 43, of Czechoslovakia, Nancy North 16, U.S.A., Tom Hilgen 20, U.S.A., Marien Farid 20, Aimen Saad 20, and Ossama Montaaaz 20, of Egypt. The relay was coached by Syndi Goldenson of the U.S.A. staff.

At 5:48 a.m. the race began. Each swimmer was accompanied by a boat. On each boat there was a navigator and crew, at least three paddlers who rotated shifts every three hours, a Catalina Channel Swimming Federation observer, a coach and other support people.

Ken Jewitt was the head navigator. It was his responsibility to keep all the swimmers on course. He had five support boats which helped to plot the course, keep the boats on course, keep other boats out of the way, transport the medical personnel, press or paddlers to any boat, and deal with any marine life problems.

The publicity and communications were handled by Katy O'Hara. She kept everyone on shore and on the various boats informed on the swimmers' progress and any other developments.

Dottie York was in charge of the paddlers. She assigned them to each boat and found relief paddlers when necessary.

The conditions were amazingly calm, which led to exceedingly quick times. The race went off without any problems.

At the beginning the International relay took an early lead and was never caught. The relay set a new overall record of 8 hours 14 minutes.

In the individual race the Egyptian Mohamed Ibrahim Elwakeel took an early lead followed closely by Rick Heltzel and John York. In the women's race Lamiaa Zahy started out quickly followed by Allison Streeter and Carol Lee-Heltzel. Carol had suit problems and had to change within the first forty-five minutes. She had to play catch-up the rest of the race. For the first four hours the lead did not change. Gradually Rick Heltzel caught Mohamed and led for two hours then was passed by John York. Allison passed Lamiaa and held her position until Carol passed her in the last two miles of the race.

Everything was running smoothly. There were many fish sightings, however. Around nine a.m., a shark was seen circling Rick Heltzel's boat. The navigator's codeword for shark was "seaweed". All the captains were alerted, the boats moved closer together and extra paddlers were put in the water. None of the swimmers knew what was happening. Seals and dolphins were spotted throughout the day. The only other fish scare occurred when a whale emerged in the middle of the boat pack. It submerged three or four times as it passed the swimmers. One of the English swimmers swore it went right under him.

Each of the swimmers had different feeding patterns and ate differently. Rick

Heltzel preferred hot chocolate and ERG with a candy bar. In the seventh hour he began coughing up blood so he was switched to water and fructose. A doctor was brought on board. Rick was fed every half hour. As the day wore on the fluid was heated as Rick was getting cold despite the 70 water temperature. The distance and his getting sick was taking its toll. The coach had him slow down, drink every fifteen minutes and take each fifteen minutes one at a time.

John York ate every hour but took long breaks. In the third hour coach Dean called his boat and asked his breaks to be shortened. John drank ERG, ate grapes, cookies, and candy.

Mohamed Ibrahim Elwakeel drank diet 7-Up, fruit juice and glucose. At the beginning he drank every hour but by the third hour switched to a half hour feeding schedule.<sup>9</sup>

Carol Lee-Heltzel had a feeding every half hour throughout the swim. She drank fluids and had solid food each time.<sup>10</sup>

Allison Streeter varied her foods. For liquid she drank water, orange juice, and tea and ate Ding Dongs and Milky Way candy bars. Allison fed every forty minutes.<sup>11</sup>

The logs for David Morgan and Lamiaa Zahy were incomplete.

The stroke counts of the swimmers also varied from John York's 80 to 84 a minute to Rick's 69 to 73, David's 66 to 82, and to Mohamed's of 66 to 90. The women were a little more consistent. Carol ranged from 76 to 80, and Allison was 77 to 79.

Some of the swimmers had personal problems. Rick got sick and this resulted in his getting cold and becoming hypothermic. David's shoulder gave out and he swam with one arm the last few miles. Carol's back and shoulder bothered her. Mohamed went out too quickly and became very weak. It took three hours for his second wind to catch up with him.

The calm conditions, warm water and perfect navigation led to extremely fast times. John York of the U.S.A. emerged from the 25.5 mile swim after eight hours fifty-four minutes. He was very pleased with his swim. It was the first time he represented the U.S. It was also the first time he competed against an international field. Despite a six year layoff he did very well. John had a harder time training than when he was younger. There was not enough time to work and swim well. The satisfaction was the same, however.

In second place was Rick Heltzel with the time of nine hours, four minutes. Mohamed Ibrahim Elwakeel was third in nine hours, twenty-three minutes. Carol Lee-Heltzel was fourth overall and first woman in nine hours, twenty-eight minutes. She was followed by Allison Streeter in nine hours, thirty-three minutes, Lamiaa Zahy in nine hours, fifty-two minutes and David Morgan in eleven hours, twenty-three minutes.

It was a successful day for the CCSF and Catalina Channel history.

Joe Bommarito had attempted the Channel in 1983 but aborted after fourteen and a half hours. On August 22nd, after a year of training and stroke lessons, he entered the water at Catalina. The conditions were good with only a slight chop. Joe maintained his stroke count from 68 to 70 throughout the crossing.

The hardest part of Joe's crossing was the last three hours. He had to stop to urinate but he could not. In the last hour he stopped every five to ten minutes. Joe was in a mild case of hypothermia. His kidneys had altered their function due to the cold.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, after fourteen hours Joe walked ashore north of Marineland. After a few minutes of warming he was able to relieve himself.

The tenth crossing of the summer was by Suzanne Riedinger, a 39 year old swimmer from Northern California. She was coached by Cindy Cleveland. She was very positive throughout the crossing. At the beginning of the swim Suzanne fed every two hours then dropped to an hour and a half and finally to an hour. Usually she had a glass of ERG and a piece of fruit. For the last two feeds she drank Pepsi.<sup>13</sup>

It was a calm night with smooth seas. In the morning a school of dolphins surfaced near the boat. Suzanne became the fifty-third person to swim Catalina. Her time was ten hours, fifty-seven minutes.

On September 13 a relay team made up of six men over 60 became the oldest to accomplish the swim and the only all male relay to swim from Catalina to the mainland. The Polar Bear's team consisted of Bill Bell 61, Ray Falk 61, Harvey Yurak 64, Al Guth 76, Bob Bowker 63, and Fred Ellis 60. The swim took fifteen hours, nine minutes. Three members had to swim three one hour legs.

The relay began from Long Point on Catalina. A hurricane in Mexico pushed the swimmers to the north, forcing them to land at Portuguese Bend, five miles north of Cabrillo Beach. The water was extremely warm, around 72 degrees. A full moon helped to make it a beautiful crossing.

The last swim of the summer was by a relay team of swimmers from Colorado. Four men and two women completed the swim in eight hours, twenty-eight minutes--the second fastest relay time ever. The team was made up of Amy Siegel, Kimberly Griffes, Kevin Andrew, Rick Samuelson, Mike Suttle, and John Gaudreau. The relay swam the 21.5 mile course from Long Point to Cabrillo Beach.

The 1984 season was the most successful on the Catalina Channel history. There were nine individual crossings and three relays. The International race across the Catalina Channel had gone well and generated a lot of publicity for marathon swimming.

### **The Middle Eighties 1985 - 1987**

The 1985 season began with a world record set by 49 year old John Hill. John became the oldest to cross the Catalina Channel on August 18. His crossing took nineteen hours and fifteen minutes. John was coached by John York and Penny Lee Dean. The crossing was far from ideal. There was a southerly chop for the first four hours. This was discouraging to John. His shoulder hurt from the beginning and he was not able to pull with his left arm. For the first three hours he fed every hour. He drank ERG, ate sandwiches, cookies and had some fruit. At 1 a.m. his feedings were switched to forty-five minutes. He was cold so the ERG was heated. At 2:15 a.m. his feedings were switched to half hours. He was having trouble urinating. As a result starting from 3:10 a.m. he was fed every twenty minutes. At 5:15 a.m. John did not know how much longer he would be able to last. His face was blue, as were his upper shoulders. John did last until 3:49 p.m. when he slowly crawled onto the rocks below Marineland. He was exhausted. He was transported to the hospital by the L. A. county lifeguards.

"There was a point there when I really wanted to quit. I was so cold, so tired. The only thing I looked forward to was going to my hot stuffy car and just sitting in it. . . I didn't want to let down Penny and John, and partly because, in a way, it's much easier

to suffer through it than explain why you failed. I think that's true of life in general. People aren't interested in why you fail. Then, if you're like me, you'd have to try again, and it wouldn't necessarily be any easier. I guess I just don't like to fail."14

Hill's record only lasted eleven days. On August 28 Dale Petranec, 50, from Voorhees, New Jersey set out to become the oldest swimmer to swim the channel. Dale entered the water at Emerald Bay where the water temperature was around 70 degrees. The sea was calm. He feasted on coffee, ERG, raisins and other fruits throughout the swim. He remained in good spirits. There was a major scare on the swim, however. In the early morning hours there was thick fog. At one point on the Loran C, two ships coming in opposite directions and the escort boat were all in the same space. The crew was stationed around the boat to watch and listen for the ships. The paddlers moved Dale closer to the boat but a little ahead of the boat. Everyone was instructed what to do if they were hit. The captain could not raise either ship by radio but kept alerting them of the swimmer in the water. Within ten minutes the first ship passed the stern by three hundred yards. Less than a minute later the other ship crossed four hundred yards in front of it. Dale's stroke count only ranged from 58 to 56 strokes a minute during the crossing. Thirteen hours, twenty-eight minutes after he began Dale emerged east of Point Vicente, establishing a new record for the oldest person's crossing.

Two relay swims occurred in early September. The first, the "Just For Fun" relay, swam on September 5th. The relay members included John York, Syndi Goldenson, Pete Mirich, Pam Nickle, Alan Shilling, and Bob Tierney, Jr. It was a relaxing crossing. Alan and Pete were excited and stayed up most of the night while everyone else slept. The team swam from Catalina to the mainland in a quick nine hours thirty-four minutes.

The second relay saw a return of the Polar Bears. Jurgen Schmidt replaced Robert Bowker; otherwise, Bell, Ellis, Falk, Guth, and Yurak were the same. The goal was a double crossing from the mainland to Catalina and back. The swim began on September 13th. There were quite a few problems. The worst was the boat; the PT 73 died two miles off the Catalina shore. It had too much horsepower for the relay's speed. The double crossing goal had to be aborted. The last swimmer went the last two miles without the boat. Once he touched shore John York had to paddle him back to the boat. The crossing had only taken fourteen hours and thirty-one minutes. This was a record in the other direction for the all male swim and also for the oldest person's swim.

The last swim of the 1985 season occurred on September 18th. Cathy Moore tackled the channel for the second time in 1985. In August she became seasick and had to give up her attempt. She returned a month later to set the record straight. The conditions were perfect and Cathy's spirits remained high. Unlike the first attempt the night swimming did not spook her. Her stroke count was from 62 to 67. She was able to drink water and ERG but her stomach was still upset. Cathy completed the crossing in nine hours, twenty-five minutes, a very respectable time.15 She became the fifty-sixth person to cross the Catalina Channel.

The 1986 season was composed of four crossings by male swimmers. The first was accomplished by veteran Dave Yudovin. On July 27 he swam from the mainland to Catalina. The purpose of the crossing was as a preparation for an English Channel assault in late August.

The beginning of the swim was very rough. Dave left from Marineland. Within an hour the sea had calmed down. The water temperature was 62 degrees but rose steadily as the crossing progressed. Dave ate cheese sandwiches, Tiger Milk bars and drank fluid. His stroke count was very consistent, sixty for the first five hours. From that point it varied from 55 to 60. Dave had a long smooth stroke.

Dave's spirits dropped a bit in the last hour and a half. He was tired and became cranky. A pace swimmer entered the water to assist him. Finally, he was able to push through his pain with the support of paddler Pam Nickle. Dave became the twelfth swimmer to cross in that direction. His time was thirteen hours and forty-six minutes.

Two days later Frank Fredregill began a swim from Catalina. The first six hours were rough. Most of the people on the boat were seasick. Gradually the sea calmed. Frank was consistently stroking 66 to 70 strokes a minute. The water temperature was in the high sixties.

Frank had a well-organized swim. The only flaw was one of the two paddleboards was too short. The paddler on that board could not keep up with Frank. The board was pulled out and Frank was guided by one board. This is sufficient unless there is a problem with sharks. At 8:43 a.m. two sharks approached the boat. The sharks were circling the boat. Everyone was prepared to pull in Frank if necessary. The navigator felt the sharks were too close and began firing his rifle at them. After a few shots they disappeared. The sharks appeared to be a mother 6-7' and a baby. Frank remained calm throughout the scare and even teased everyone on board.<sup>16</sup> In the last two miles the water temperature dropped as expected. Frank was doing very well. He walked ashore at Marineland. His time was twelve hours eleven minutes.

The next swimmer of the summer was thirty-three year old Mike Suttle. In 1984 he had been a member of the Colorado relay team. That experience made him aware of swimming at night and the routines followed in channel crossings. With the support of channel swimmer and friend Richard Marks, Mike decided to tackle the Channel on August 24. From March through August he doubled his pool training during the week and spent his weekends in the ocean.

The beginning of Mike's swim was rather hectic. The swim began before the rowboat had returned to the escort ship. Usually the swim begins once the support crew are back on the boat and the rowboat is tied up. This error created a major problem. Within a few minutes Mike, enclosed by two paddlers, passed the escort boat. The navigator was yelling to the paddlers which way to guide Mike. It was five minutes before the boat got underway. Mike was swimming in complete darkness except for the fluorescent night sticks each paddler had tied to his arms. Unfortunately, the ship's sea anchor was already in the water. The sea anchor adds extra resistance to the boat so the vessel can stay with the swimmer. The boat could not catch up to Mike. For almost an hour he swam a quarter of a mile in front of the boat in darkness. He was frustrated and disoriented but he did not let these mishaps control him. The boat caught up once Mike took his first break.

From that point on the swim went well. The water was 68-70 and calm. In the morning hours a fog blanketed the sea. Mike maintained a stroke count of 60 except for a slight drop in the middle of the channel. For feedings Mike had made around one hundred peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. On the first break he could not eat the

sandwich. He was unable to chew the bread. The salt water had dried up his salivary juices. During the rest of the crossing he drank Body Fuel and water and ate yogurt and Tiger bars. His breaks were limited to one minute.

Mike completed the Catalina to mainland crossing in eleven hours, twenty-three minutes. He was pleased with his time and the crossing.<sup>17</sup>

The fourth and final swim of 1986 was by 32 year old Dave Clark of San Diego. On October 5 Dave swam from Catalina to the mainland. The water was calm. As he was not a fast swimmer he drifted two to three miles off course, however. He averaged a stroke count of 50 per minute.

Dave's goal was to get to the other side. As a kid he thought of swimming Catalina as an unbelievable thing to do. Twenty two years later he did it.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the swim Dave drank hot chocolate, Gatorade and grape juice. In the middle of the night he had the liquids warmed. For solid food he ate grapes, bran muffins and cookies. During a feeding he swam backstroke to keep moving. With seven miles to go, Dave's shoulder started aching. He tried to adjust his stroke and to accept the pain. Twelve hours and thirty-four minutes after he entered the water he emerged on the Palos Verdes peninsula. He had made it. Dave was pleased with his swim and felt as if he glowed inside.<sup>19</sup>

An interesting note on the 1986 swimmers, none had a coach. Each trained, planned and accomplished the swim by himself, with the aid of excellent support crews.

There were only two swims in 1987. Both were outstanding and unique. Frank Reynolds broke the oldest swimmer record and Taranath Shenoy was not only the first Indian swimmer but the first deaf person to swim the channel.

At 1:05 a.m. on August 14 Frank Reynolds stood on the shore at Emerald Bay awaiting his third Catalina crossing assault. In 1983 he trained for the crossing but changed his mind two weeks before the swim. In 1986, after being in the water over thirteen hours, he was pulled out delirious only two hundred yards from the finish. His coach, Penny Lee Dean, who had been with him for four years, quietly greased him for the swim.

It was his time. He had worked hard for a year in preparation for the rematch. A nutritionist had worked with his diet for four months.

At 1:14 a.m. Frank entered the water. He looked strong and was able to maintain his strokes at 64 per minute. The water was a little rough for the first four hours. Many on the boat were seasick. There was limited visibility, also. The water was warm, 69 degrees.

For the first five hours Frank had a feeding every half hour. He alternated between Exceed, which is a glucose drink, and Ensure which is a liquid meal. On each feeding he also drank water. The goal was to get a quart of liquids into Frank every hour. From the fifth to the ninth hour he drank every twenty minutes. At the end of the swim he drank every fifteen minutes. The liquids were warmed throughout the swim.

A constant watch was kept on the water temperature and on Frank. His skin color was good until the end of the swim. At four miles out the water dropped to 66 degrees, but the last two miles it was down to 60 degrees. To test Frank's mental capacity every hour he was asked a personal history question. None of these he knew ahead of time. For example: "How many children do you have? Name them." (Frank has seven).

"Which children were born outside of the U.S.? What is your dad's middle name?" As the hours wore on the questions got harder. He did not have a problem with any of them.

During the swim a pod of dolphins were seen, a shark, a school of pilot whales, and Frank even saw a sting ray. A few boats came a little close but nothing was too dangerous.

Frank's stroke was strong but as he grew tired he lost his leg power and his arm pull shortened. Numerous signals for stroke corrections were given. Frank did not respond.

From 10 a.m. until 11:48 a.m. Frank slowed considerably. With the poor visibility the shore was not easily seen. Frank could not see the shore from the water. He was less than three miles out. He began to doubt the distance and kept trying to look. The water temperature had dropped to 62 degrees and was still dropping.

A rowboat was put in the water with a mile to go. Frank was cold and anxious to finish. As Frank was getting worse he was guided into the nearest point. There was a very strong surge. Frank was thrown upon the rocks, as were many of the support personnel. Frank cleared the water's edge at 11:48 a.m. He had done it in ten hours, thirty-four minutes. It was the eighteenth fastest time in that direction. Frank set the record for the oldest person's crossing. After thirty minutes of warming he was fine.

According to Frank, "I hurt all over, my throat is killing me from swallowing so much sea water, but I finally accomplished my goal."<sup>20</sup>

Frank's drive inspired all who were part of his swim. He returned until he was successful. It was an amazing feat.

The second swim of 1987 was accomplished by Taranath Shenoy, a 28 year old deaf man from India. He was also only partially sighted.

Taranath had swum the English Channel three times and wanted to swim Catalina. On September 25 he entered the water at Doctor's Cove. He was accompanied by his coach, Ninod Gurujee. With the language barrier there was limited communication with the support crew.

Conditions were perfect and Taranath sailed across the channel in ten hours and fifteen minutes. He became the sixty-first person to swim Catalina.

### **The Late Eighties**

After a very disappointing and unsuccessful season in 1988 there were two individual and four relay crossings in 1989. Both individual swimmers had made unsuccessful attempts earlier in the summer and returned to conquer the channel.

The first of these swimmers was Steve Frantz from San Diego. On Steve's first attempt a large unidentifiable marine life was spotted under the paddler. As it was thought to be either a great white shark or a dolphin, the swimmer was removed from the water one hour and ten minutes into the swim.

As Steve was frightened during the first attempt he decided to swim during the day on his second attempt.<sup>21</sup> At 6:33 on September 9, 1989 Steve entered the warm waters at Catalina. It was a clam, flat day with a light wind. The water was a comfortable 68.5 degrees. Steve maintained 67-68 strokes per minutes for the first hour and a half. At the hour mark he fed on electrolytes. For the next few hours he fed every forty-five to fifty minutes. Besides electrolytes, he drank a high carbohydrate

replacement, water and tea. He ate peaches, took vitamins and even ate jelly beans.<sup>22</sup>

During the mid morning a shark was sighted. One of the assistants on the swim entered the small support boat in order to provide for extra safety for the swimmer. Luckily, it was only a small blue shark. Gradually everyone calmed down on the boat.

In the fifth hour Steve's break took nine minutes. He took Advil for the pain in his left arm. As the swim progressed Steve's arm barely cleared the water. By the finish he was not recovering above the water with his left arm.<sup>23</sup>

In early afternoon the wind picked up, forming a few whitecaps. Steve's stroke count dropped to 60-62 a minute.

By 4:00 p.m. Steve's drink had to be heated. He was in the first stages of hypothermia. Steve began to refuse food and was having problems urinating. This is a common problem for male distance swimmers.

With a half mile to go Steve's spirit was high. He joked and kept stroking with only one arm.<sup>24</sup>

After thirteen hours and fifteen minutes and forty two seconds Steve painfully climbed ashore. In his second attempt, despite severe pain and hypothermia, Steve Frantz made it.

Vicki Keith, a 28 year old swimmer for Canada entered the Catalina Channel for the second time on September 23rd. In her first crossing she had eight miles to go when she was pulled from the water. She had not made any forward progress for quite some time.<sup>25</sup>

Vicki's swims are a little unique as Vicki swims butterfly. On each of her swims she raises money for various charities.

Her swim began at 1:33 a.m. She was swimming from Catalina to the mainland. The water was a warm 68 degrees, with a one foot swell.

Vicki averaged 27 butterfly strokes per minute during the first six hours. Similar to swims up to the late 1970's, Vicki utilized a two hour feed pattern consuming hot chocolate, water, peaches, fruit salad and M & M's. Her breaks ranged from six minutes to twelve minutes in length.<sup>26</sup>

In the early morning hours the wind calmed down, leaving a glassy ocean. Numerous schools of fish and over 50 dolphins were spotted. A few ships passed as she crossed the shipping lane; none were close however.

At 11:30 a.m. the press boat arrived for pictures and news releases. At 12:00 p.m. a photographer went underwater to photograph Vicki as she swam. She still had six and a half miles to go.

The water temperature dropped gradually to 64 degrees. In the last three hours Vicki did not feed. At 4:27 p.m. Vicki became the 63rd person to swim Catalina. Her time was fourteen hours, fifty-three minutes and twenty-six seconds. It was the sixty-first fastest crossing out of 86 individual swims.<sup>27</sup>

For the first time there were numerous relays attempting Catalina at one time. Dave Clark from San Diego formed three relay teams. In order to save money the teams swam at one time with one major boat supporting them and a smaller one. The relays were matched by speed so each team would stay together. If one athlete swam ahead he had to wait for the other two swimmers. As it turned out the teams were evenly divided so most of the swimmers did not have to wait. Each athlete swims a one hour leg. The

athlete has five minutes to tag to previous swimmer.<sup>28</sup>

The teams were composed of:

Steve Frantz	Alberto Chiappa	Bob West
Dave Clark	Art Paniagua	Chuck Coleman
Rebecca Fishbein	Bob West	Sue McClanahan
Steve Frankum	Jack Robertson	Jamshid Khajavi
Nancy Howden	Mike Devlin	Tina Moore
Mike Gibellino	Janis Bloomquist	Margaret Dickson

The first three athletes entered the water at 6:43 a.m. at Doctor's Cove in Catalina. The water temperature was 66 degrees. Within a few miles the water warmed up to 70 degrees.

During the relay swims the group tagged with high fives. The water was calm throughout the swim. A few dolphins were seen and quite a few jellyfish but beyond this there was little marine life. The swims were rather uneventful except when one of the swimmers almost touched the boat when he needed a feeding. Luckily, one of the other swimmers yelled a warning just before the man inadvertently disqualified the team.

Each swimmer ended up swimming twice. The finish was a little dangerous. As Janis and Margaret tried to climb over the rocks a wave hit them, knocking them over. Both were cut but managed to emerge from the water together. The three relays finished after eleven hours, forty-six minutes and seven seconds.<sup>29</sup>

These relays were the tenth, eleventh and twelfth relay to complete the 21 mile crossing.

The final relay of the summer was the United States National team on August 11th. The team swam from the Mainland to Catalina. The swimmers and the order was as follows: Jay Wilkerson, Jim McConica, Martha Jahn, Karen Burton, Chad Hundebly and Erika Reetz. The swimmers ranged in age from 18 to 39 years old.

The swim began at 2:23 a.m. Jay had to wade ashore through a very thick kelp bed in complete darkness as the boat's floodlight did not work. Despite this, he began very quickly. In his leg Jay swam easily over three and a half miles.<sup>30</sup>

Jim's leg went smoothly. He covered well over three miles. The water also warmed from 63 to 65 degrees.

During Martha's leg she was a little nervous in the darkness so the paddlers pulled in tight. She covered three miles with an 86 per minute stroke count.

Karen, despite a mild case of seasickness, held 87 strokes per minute and covered three miles.

Chad had a fast leg covering over three and a half miles. During his crossing some jellyfish were sighted. A mild swell also began.<sup>31</sup>

Erika was the sixth swimmer in the water. She swam over 2.5 miles with a 89 stroke per minute average.

Jay reentered the water at 8:23 a.m. While he was in the water the boat left and found a place to land. Jay swam over 2.5 miles.

With less than 200 yards to go, Jim took over for Jay. At 9:25 a.m. Jim cleared the water's edge. The relay's time was seven hours, two minutes and forty-five seconds. This was a new World Record not only for that direction but the fastest time ever.<sup>32</sup>

The 1989 season proved to be one of determination. The swimmers fought early failure, overcame fear and defeated the odds. The result was two successful individual swims and four successful relays, one in a World Record time.

There were thirty-two individual crossings and fourteen relay crossings between 1980 and 1989. In the early Eighties the men's and overall speed record from Catalina to the mainland were rewritten by Jim McConica. In the middle Eighties three men set the oldest record for swimming the Catalina Channel with Frank Reynolds at 55 holding the record. The International race in 1984 was very successful with eight individual swims and a relay record. In 1989 the United States National team destroyed the relay record by over an hour.