

A History of the Catalina Channel Swims

Since 1927

by  
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### **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 5**

### **The Seventies: 1971--1979**

Numerous attempts to swim the Channel were made between 1958 and 1970 but to no avail. Then a new breed of marathon swimmers emerged. Unlike the amateurs of the twenties or even the professionals of the Fifties, these swimmers had extensive pool training which they incorporated with their ocean training. This gave them both speed and endurance. As were the Fifties, the Seventies also were divided into two components. The first consists of 1971 through 1975, the second 1976 to the 1979. The former entails individual swims while in the latter the ocean marathon team emerged which reshaped the world of marathon swimming. Lynne Cox is the focus of the early Seventies and Penny Lee Dean is the focus of the late Seventies.

#### **The Early Seventies**

On August 14, 1971, four teenage swimmers under the guidance of Ron Blackledge, set out to swim from Catalina to the mainland. There were two males and two females representing the Seal Beach Swim Club.<sup>1</sup> The boys, Dennis Sullivan and Andy Taylor, were fourteen and twelve respectively. The girls, Lynne Cox and Stacy Fresonke, were both fourteen, Stacy being a few months younger than Lynne.<sup>2</sup> The swim took 12 hours and 34 minutes.<sup>3</sup> As Lynne later remarked, "That wasn't too good, but the idea was just to finish. I kept pulling away from everyone and they'd slow me down to let the others catch up." The time, however, was quick enough to set a men's record, breaking Tom Park's 1954 record of 13 hours, 25 minutes. Fresonke and Taylor both set records for being the youngest to cross the Channel. Little did anyone realize the impact this swim would have on these swimmers, nor did anyone foresee this as the beginning of one of the greatest woman swimmer's career.

1972 was also a year for records. The fastest and the oldest records were established. Greta Andersen returned to assault the Catalina Channel; Lynne Cox's brother, David took a shot at Catalina; and thirteen year old Andy Taylor swam the Channel for a second time.

The Channel was not tackled until the beginning of September due to numerous storms.<sup>5</sup> David Cox set out at 1:00 a.m. from Doctor's Cove on Catalina on September 1. The sky was blanketed with a wet fog, and there was a light wind. The water was a comfortable 68.6 degrees. Coupled with the knowledge he gathered from his sister's 1971 crossing and the fact he was an extraordinary pool swimmer, he was able to sprint across the Channel.<sup>7</sup> His time was 8 hours and 50 minutes.<sup>8</sup> This was just under two hours faster than Andersen's record and over 3 1/2 hours ahead of Andy Taylor and Dennis Sullivan's record in this direction. David became the fastest person to swim in either direction as he also beat Tom Park's Catalina-mainland 9 hour, 10 minute record.

Within a week, Andy Taylor swam the Channel for his second time. He was thirteen, 5'5", and weighed 125 pounds.<sup>9</sup> He had learned to swim at eighteen months under the guidance of Greta Andersen. For seven and one-half years he swam with Andersen, then he joined Seal Beach Swim team.<sup>10</sup> After Andy's 1971 group swim he decided to assault the Channel individually. His goal was to better his own record.<sup>11</sup> Sponsored by the Seal Beach Sport Fishing Industry,<sup>12</sup> he entered the water on

September 6th. Nine hours and 19 minutes later he reached the shore at Point Vicente. He had had some problems with chop during the swim, and this slowed him down a bit. Nevertheless, he improved his time by over three hours. He did, however, miss David Cox's five day old record by twenty-nine minutes.<sup>13</sup>

After not competing since 1965, at forty-five years of age, Greta Andersen prepared to swim Catalina. Interestingly enough she followed one of her pupils.

But what inspired Greta to come out of retirement? Was it the challenge for her age, "everyone says you're old at 45, but it isn't true? And I'll prove it isn't true?"<sup>14</sup> Or was it the challenge of Lynne Cox? At fifteen, Lynne had just broken the English Channel record. The latter explanation seems to be the most important.

Andersen planned to swim Catalina in preparation for swimming the English Channel.<sup>15</sup> "I just want to be the best. I'm not getting any younger, but experience is a big factor in ocean swimming."<sup>16</sup> She even invited Cox to race with her. "She'd better have her own boat, because she might be ahead of me part of the time. Somebody said she'd better have her own boat because I thought she'd flounder, but no way."<sup>17</sup>

Andersen made some training adjustments. Unlike her past training she had to swim six extra miles a week. She attributed this to having slow metabolism.<sup>18</sup> To add to her publicity Andersen announced two things: first, she planned to swim from Avalon to the Queen Mary. Second, she would set up a swim stake to benefit the American Prisoners of war (POW's) and Missing in Actions (MIA's). For a dollar, people could buy a ticket and guess the hours and minutes it would take her to swim the Channel. First prize was \$500, second was \$300 and \$200 for third.<sup>19</sup>

Andersen's swim was delayed in order to insure greater public support and publicity for the swim stake. She also issued a challenge to other marathon swimmers to race her.<sup>20</sup> She attempted the swim on September 9 but due to severe fog she had to retire since she had drifted off of Huntington Beach.

Finally on October 9, she began her second attempt alone. No one had accepted her challenge. She swam over 9 miles in five hours. There were strong currents off the mainland, which forced her to land at Marineland. Her time was 12 hours and 18 minutes, over 1 hour and 31 minutes off her own record, set fourteen years earlier.<sup>21</sup> Andersen was pleased with her swim. "I'm proud that I made it. I'm in pretty good shape for 45."<sup>22</sup> She did not attempt the English Channel in 1973, however.

In 1974, both David and Lynne Cox planned to swim to Catalina. Lynne felt the Catalina Channel is more difficult than the English Channel, "Our water is colder; there are sharks-even whales."<sup>23</sup>

David Cox's swim began at 12:55 a.m. on August 6th. His goal was derived from his 1972 swim. "Last time my legs buckled when I hit sand. This time I am going to walk out before I collapse."<sup>24</sup> His swim was beset with problems. He was continuously stung by jellyfish and 3 1/2 miles off the mainland he swam into a strong current. He had difficulty fighting it and it slowed his swim which took 10 hours and 20 minutes. This was one and one-half hours off his 1972 record swim.<sup>25</sup>

Near the end of August, Bob Bejan, a fourteen and one half year old from Los Alamitos, swam from Catalina to the mainland. He was not a fast swimmer; he just wanted to complete the crossing. Bob averaged forty strokes per minute for the 13 hour and 45 minute swim. During the crossing he figured out how many strokes he was swimming

per hour. Bob also practiced mathematical formulas in his head. He thought of anything to keep his mind off the swim and it worked.<sup>26</sup>

After Lynne Cox swam the Catalina Channel in 1971, she decided to tackle the English Channel in 1972. At fifteen Cox set the overall world record from England to France in 9 hours and 57 minutes, a good twenty-six minutes under the former record.<sup>27</sup> Her enthusiasm was shattered three weeks later when another American broke her record by thirteen minutes. But Cox was a fighter and returned to England in 1973 determined to regain the overall title. She reached her goal by swimming the Channel in 9 hours 36 minutes.<sup>28</sup> Having conquered the Channel, Cox decided to stay home in 1974. As her brother held the overall record for Catalina this inspired her to swim Catalina again.

Lynne was 5'6" and weighed between 160 and 198 pounds depending on the type of swim for which she was preparing. One of four children, her father, a dentist, financed her swims. Her family was very supportive of her athletic endeavors.<sup>29</sup>

On September 9, Cox set out to swim from the Island to the mainland. It was a dark eerie night with fog hanging low over the water. There happened to be a red tide so the water was illuminated by the plankton's phosphorescence.<sup>30</sup> As the swim wore on Lynne began to lose her confidence. Frightened by the darkness and the marine life, Lynne called to her parents aboard the Bandido. Immediately her parents entered a skiff to reassure and accompany her. In just this short period of time a thick layer of fog blanketed the area and her parents were unable to find her nor could the support boat.<sup>31</sup> The boats began to circle in search of her. At last and to the relief of all, Lynne was found. She was alone, disoriented, and on the verge of hysteria.<sup>32</sup> Immediately, she gave up and climbed into the boat. As one observer noted, "the character business is very important because of the monotony of the hours. I know the most painful part is not the swim completed, but the swim not completed, the pain of stopping for any reason. But there is no shame in stopping."<sup>33</sup> Lynne however felt differently. "I felt like I fell on my face. But my family and friends were there to pick me up."<sup>34</sup>

Was Cox over prepared or just unprepared mentally? It seemed everyone had an answer, but Lynne returned to her daily routine of attending Los Alamitos High School in the morning and swimming six to eight miles in the afternoon in Long Beach.<sup>35</sup> Thirteen days later, however, Cox was standing at the beach adjacent to Marineland, ready to try again. Mrs. Cox had made all the arrangements, and she was not told of the swim until noon of that day.<sup>36</sup>

It was a beautiful night with no fog. She began at 10:35 p.m. and throughout the swim was accompanied by a skiff and a paddleboard. The paddleboard was manned by Mark Le Gault, a twenty-three year old Long Beach Lifeguard.<sup>37</sup>

"It was really hard at the beginning because I had to get my confidence back."<sup>38</sup> Cox relaxed and was swimming well until the wee hours of the morning. Then as she put it, "I began to look for excuses to stop again . . . I was trying to convince myself I didn't feel good, but my body was too strong. It refused to give in to all the boredom. It would not be hypnotized by the rhythm of the swim."<sup>39</sup> Besides the support of her family, John Sonnichsen acted as her trainer for years. Sonnichsen at one time was married to Greta Andersen and had served as her trainer for years. Mr. Yeo, the AAU Marathon chairman and good friend of the Cox's, was also along and paddled for Lynne.<sup>40</sup>

As Cox faltered, Sonnichsen, Yeo, and the rest of the people on the boat



encouraged her to continue. Slowly she overcame the emptiness and suffering she felt and pushed towards Catalina. With an hour to go she was told she was ahead of David's record. This inspired her even more and her stroke count jumped to eighty a minute.<sup>41</sup> After 8 hours and 48 minutes, and two minutes ahead of David's overall record, Cox walked ashore at Catalina.<sup>42</sup> The swim was also a new women's record in this direction by around seven hours. Since the swim Cox has only attempted swims which have never been accomplished by women and in some cases by men, such as the Cook Strait in New Zealand, the Strait of Magellan, and the Cape of Good Horn.<sup>43</sup>

As the early Seventies came to a close the single crossing of Catalina had not only been rewritten for the men and women but the overall records were held by Lynne and David Cox. Stacey Fresonke and Andy Taylor became the youngest to swim the Catalina Channel while Greta Andersen scored a first by being the oldest female.

With the inception of the marathon team concept in the second half of the Seventies each speed record was rewritten. After standing for nineteen years Greta Andersen's double crossing record also fell. Then two men completed the double crossing. The next section features Penny Lee Dean.

### **The Late Seventies**

Between 1974 and 1976 two marathon swimming teams emerged in southern California, David Cox's club and the Orca Marathon Swim Club. Prior to this development swimmers trained individually and usually without a coach. Swimming with a team had numerous advantages; no longer did a swimmer have to spend long hours alone as there were three or four others doing the same workouts, feeling the same pain, and having the same problems. Secondly, this led to greater competition which led to further improvements. Lastly, the marathon coach became a visible part of the daily workouts. These changes, plus the emphasis placed on pool swimming for speed, led to the astounding accomplishments achieved between 1976 and 1979.

In this period there were nineteen crossings by ten swimmers. Of these, ten records were broken and/or established. These included the men's and women's single records for each direction, the women's double crossing for each direction, and the men's double crossing from mainland to mainland. This section will feature Penny Lee Dean who held the overall single crossings in both directions and the women's double crossing as the Seventies came to a close.

According to his high school coach, Neil Newman, "When Dave swam for me he hated distance swimming."<sup>44</sup> Much had changed in eight years. David Yudovin had begun training in the ocean in 1974 with David Cox's team. His goal was to swim the Catalina Channel. Six days a week for two years he trained from three to ten miles daily. At last he was prepared to attempt the Channel in 1976. David was twenty-six years old, 5'8" tall, and weighed 150 pounds. He was rather light and this played a major part in all of his marathon swims.<sup>45</sup>

Early Wednesday morning, August 18th, David entered the water at Doctor's Cove on Catalina. He was concerned about his chances since one of his teammates, Pat Schlup, had failed the day before. Nevertheless, David made it. His only problem was the cold as he swam into the upwelling currents off Point Vicente. The temperature dropped almost four degrees three miles off the coast.<sup>46</sup> Despite the cold David

continued, his swim took 11 hours and 50 minutes.<sup>47</sup>

David Cox's swimmers had been 50 percent successful in August, 1976. September awaited the trial of three swimmers of Orca Marathon Swim Club coached by Mrs. Siga Albrecht. Albrecht stated, "There is not a doubt in my mind they'll all make it."<sup>48</sup>

The first of these swimmers was Penny Lee Dean. Penny swam Catalina in 7 hours, 15 minutes, and 55 seconds, a new record by 1 hour and 32 minutes. Before discussing the swim, some background information seems appropriate.

Dean began swimming before she was a year old. She competed in AAU swimming for fifteen years and swam at the AAU Nationals on two occasions. In addition, she competed in the three mile Junior National Long Distance Nationals for three years, winning in 1971. It was becoming apparent to her coaches and herself that she was a long distance swimmer.<sup>49</sup>

With the completion of high school in 1973, Dean entered Pomona College in southern California. During her freshman year her lifelong desire to swim the English Channel reemerged. In early August, after knee surgery, she attempted and won her first ocean swim. At one of these swims she met Lynne Cox. In a later conversation Cox suggested she attempt to swim Catalina before going to England.<sup>50</sup>

From 1974 to 1976 Dean trained with this in mind. She swam every major ocean race up and down the southern California coast and rarely was defeated by either male or female in any distance over three miles.<sup>51</sup> In the summer of 1976 Penny won the Catalina Classic, against men and women, by 58 minutes. And she beat all the men and women in the 10 mile Huntington Beach to Seal Beach race by 17 minutes.<sup>52</sup> In preparation for the Catalina Channel, Dean and the other members of the Orca were swimming three to fifteen miles a day, six days a week, in the ocean. This, on an average, was five to eight miles more a day than David Cox's group. Dean was also swimming three to five hours a day in the pool with the Lakewood Aquatic Club under the guidance of Jim Montrella.<sup>53</sup>

Dean planned to swim from the mainland to Catalina as the fastest overall record was held in that direction.

At 5'2", 122 pounds, the twenty-one year old felt she had a chance at the record as did her coach.<sup>54</sup> "The only question is how fast. I think Penny has a chance to break the Cox record."<sup>55</sup>

At 12:00 a.m. on September 1st, Dean was standing on the shore adjacent to the Mainland Pier waiting to begin her swim. "As I stood on the rocks with only my suit, cap, and goggles on, I realized how peaceful it was. The only sound was that of the waves crashing on the rocks . . . My body was shaking out of control. I was not cold and was not nervous but I was shaking. . . As I glanced towards the boat it looked so tiny. Then the starting shot was fired. Momentarily I hesitated . . . Mechanically I crawled across the slippery rocks into the retreating water."<sup>56</sup>

The swim was made in excellent weather condition with fog and only a slight breeze. Dean had some physical problems which turned to mental difficulties as the swim continued. A fish swam into her suit, then her goggles began to leak. Instead of stopping for a new pair she continued. Mid-point in her swim her left eye was swollen shut. Fumes from the boat forced her to swim away from it. She had difficulty seeing her

paddlers and began running into them.<sup>57</sup> "Then I began thinking how cold I was getting. I wondered what I was doing there. But the paddlers kept yelling at me to think of my stroke and I finally got my head together. After that I did a lot of singing."<sup>58</sup>

At 7:26:55 a.m. Dean stepped ashore at Doctor's Cove on Catalina. Setting a new overall record by 1 hour and 32 minutes, a new women's mainland to Catalina record, Penny swam the channel in 7 hours, 15 minutes and 55 seconds.<sup>59</sup>

The next morning John York, the second member of the Orca, was scheduled to swim from Catalina to the mainland. York was only fifteen years old. He only wanted to make the crossing and had no intention of breaking David Cox's record but he did by ten seconds. York's swim took 8 hours, 49 minutes and 50 seconds.<sup>60</sup>

There was some controversy over breaking the record by ten seconds. David Cox and others claim it as a joint record. There were, however, three official timers on the crossing.<sup>61</sup>

Cindy Cleveland, a twenty-one year old physical education major from Long Beach State tackled the Channel on September 17th. Cleveland became the third member of the Orca to swim the Channel. She entered the water at 1:56 a. m. at Doctor's Cove. Along on her crossing as paddlers and/or pacers were John York, Penny Lee Dean and Lynne Cox.<sup>62</sup> Similar to York, Cleveland wanted to complete the crossing. She also wanted to swim faster than David Yudovin had. Surprisingly, Cleveland came extremely close to breaking Greta Andersen's record of 10 hours and 49 minutes set in 1958 on the first lap of her double; she was only 18 minutes off. Her time was 11 hours and 4 minutes, an excellent swim.<sup>63</sup> As she approached the shore she crashed in the waves and cut her leg. As she said: "It wasn't too bad and the more you hurt after doing something, the more worthwhile it seems."<sup>64</sup>

1976 had been a good year with four successful crossings and two records. 1977 was even better. There were nine crossings made by seven swimmers; five records were broken and/or established. The outstanding swim of the year was made by Penny Lee Dean who broke Greta Andersen's double crossing by nearly seven hours.

Mary Beth Colpo joined Orca in September, 1976. She was tired of pool swimming as she had swum for the Lakewood Aquatics Club for nine years. She wanted to swim Catalina.

In preparation, Colpo "trained all winter and swam eighteen to twenty miles a day. I trained in the pool every morning from 6 to 9 and twice a week from 4:30 to 6:30 at night." "I totally committed myself last winter."<sup>67</sup>

Colpo decided to swim from Catalina to the mainland in order to break Greta Andersen's record. She entered the water at 12:51 a.m. on August 22, 1977. The water was flat and calm throughout the swim. She stopped three times for feedings of ERG and maintained her stroke count at eighty-six to ninety-two strokes per minute. As she reached the current off the mainland she had some difficulty getting through it. Nevertheless, she broke not only Andersen's single record but John York's as well. Colpo's time was 8 hours, 43 minutes and 16 seconds.<sup>69</sup>

The very next day Syndi Goldenson, another member of Orca, swam from Catalina to the mainland. Goldenson was not a fast swimmer but she wanted to make it. "I've watched that mass of land since I was a child. Once I saw boat crossing the Channel from an airplane and tried to imagine how small a swimmer would look . . ." <sup>70</sup>

For four years she trained specifically for the swim. She had planned to swim Catalina in 1976 but knee surgery prevented her attempt. Instead she assisted planning and paddling on every other crossing. Without her help few of the swimmers would have done so well.<sup>71</sup>

Goldenson left Catalina at 12:30 a.m. In mid-channel she hit a strong current that swept her north and backwards 1 1/2 miles but she kept going.<sup>72</sup> "I was about a mile off shore when I saw land . . . Every workout I had dreamed of that moment. You know then that nothing's going to stop you."<sup>73</sup>

After 15 hours, 5 minutes and 20 seconds, Goldenson landed north of Marineland in heavy surf.<sup>74</sup> She dedicated her swim to the Exceptional Children's Foundation for which she was sponsored per mile and raised over \$1000.<sup>75</sup>

At 10:50 p.m. on September 4, 1977, Penny Lee Dean slipped into the water at Doctor's Cove. Ahead lay almost forty-two miles of swimming, the distance between Catalina and the mainland and back. Her goal was to beat Greta Andersen's nineteen year old world record. She also desired to break the record set three weeks earlier by Mary Beth Colpo.<sup>76</sup>

Dean trained five to thirteen hours a day six days a week for the crossing with the Orca Marathon Swim Club. Prior to the double crossing Dean stated: "Siga and I spent the day together on Catalina and just her presence relaxed me for my effort. We have developed a beautiful bond between us. She intuitively knows my needs and can motivate me beyond my self imposed limits."<sup>77</sup> This bond helped to ease the pain on the swim.

Dean landed on the mainland after 8 hours and 33 minutes; over ten minutes ahead of Colpo's record. She rested for seven minutes and set off again.<sup>78</sup> On the second lap Dean ran into a strong current, 12 knot wind and 6 foot waves. This slowed her immensely and forced her to land two miles east of Doctor's Cove. Mickey Pittman estimated she swam almost fifty miles. Her time was 20 hours, 3 minutes and 17 seconds, over 6 hours and 50 minutes faster than Anderson's swim.<sup>81</sup>

As she left the water she did so with the single record in each direction and the double record. In 1978, she established the world record for men and women for the English Channel and attributed that success to her Catalina Channel experience.<sup>82</sup>

Tom Park's mainland to Catalina record had not yet been broken by a male. Dan Slosberg, a twenty year old student and a member of Orca, set out to do this. He left the mainland a little after 12 a.m. on September 6th, 1977. Nine hours and 40 minutes later he landed on Catalina. He was, however, over thirty minutes slower than Park's record.<sup>83</sup>

After trying the English Channel twice, New Zealand's Sandra Blewitt decided to attempt Catalina. She trained with Lynne Cox for two months.<sup>84</sup> The twenty-seven year old bookkeeper swam for fun. "I don't try to set records but just swim to be swimming. If I set a new record, it can be an extra bonus."<sup>85</sup>

Blewitt swam from the mainland to Catalina on September 7th. Unlike many swimmers she fed on bagels, jelly beans, and coffee with honey. Her swim took 10 hours 58 minutes.<sup>86</sup> She was happy with her swim as she became the first New Zealander to cross the Channel.

After the heavy winds and currents encountered on Dean's double crossing, John York and Cindy Cleveland decided to swim from the mainland to Catalina and back on their double attempts. Again, York just wanted to make it. If he had, he would have been the first male to do so.

York's swim began at 8:07 p.m. on October 3rd from the mainland. He was swimming well and landed at Catalina after 8 hours, 31 minutes and 29 seconds, establishing a new men's record. Tom Park's record was finally beaten.<sup>87</sup> York rested for three minutes while he ate some chicken, cookies, and drank ERG. He did not know why but he also threw up even though he felt fine. As he started back towards the mainland he felt pretty good. Nevertheless, the further he went the colder he got. He also became seasick. His stroke counts were in the high eighties so no one was worried. Then it became apparent that something was wrong.<sup>89</sup>

At 3:30, "John was disoriented; regardless of what his paddlers told him he did not hear them but he kept on swimming. Arm stroke 66 and extremely wide."<sup>90</sup>

The log continued, "3:34 John's swimming is not making much forward movement, he is now 150 yards from shore; so very very close but yet so far away...arm stroke 30, 29, 28, no kick. John pulled 8 times without turning his head to breathe and Siga grabbed him."<sup>91</sup> John's swim ended 150 yards from shore. He was unconscious and his body core temperature had dropped to 88 degrees. He was near death and spent two days in the hospital recovering.<sup>92</sup> Later York remarked, "the last thing I remember I felt good enough to swim back. I felt really strong. I didn't quit, I was pulled out unconscious." York did not know if he would try again in 1978. He had given up a lot for the swim and was not sure he wanted to make that commitment again.<sup>94</sup>

The last swim of 1977 was Cindy Cleveland's double crossing. Her swim was postponed for two days due to York's failure. Siga Albrecht, both swimmers' coach, was in shock.<sup>95</sup> Finally Albrecht and everyone else recovered to some degree and Cleveland set off on the evening of October 5th. The conditions were excellent and her swim was uneventful until a shark appeared on the stern of the boat. The shark kept disappearing and reappearing until the navigator gaffed it. Cindy's swim took 24 hours, 39 minutes and 22 seconds.<sup>96</sup> This was under Andersen's old record.

As 1977 ended no male had accomplished the double crossing of Catalina. In 1978 two men did.

Dan Slosberg set out at 9:30 p.m. on September 10, 1978, from Marineland. The first three hours were rather rough. "I had a lot of bad moments. A lot of times I wished I was on the boat in a warm bunk sleeping. I wondered what I was doing out there."<sup>97</sup>

Slosberg landed on Catalina in 8 hours and 50 minutes nearly 50 minutes ahead of his crossing the year before.<sup>98</sup> His stroke count varied from sixty to eighty per minute. For nourishment he ate cookies and banana bread and drank ERG.

After 19 hours, 32 minutes and 26 seconds Slosberg finished the crossing. He became not only the first male swimmer to double-cross the Catalina Channel but also broke Penny Lee Dean's 1977 record. He swam an estimated forty-two miles.<sup>99</sup> Slosberg felt good after it was over but stated, "The last two miles seemed like they took forever."<sup>100</sup>

Slosberg's record did not last long, however. John York was prepared both mentally and physically to swim the double. For a full year, his failure had eaten away at

him.

On the night of September 21, 1978, York set out for Catalina. The conditions were excellent and he swam from the mainland to Catalina in 7 hours and 51 minutes, seconds. He broke his own record by 41 minutes.<sup>101</sup> Immediately York returned to the ocean. He felt strong and had no problems with seasickness or the cold. York was able to swim back in eight hours fifty-one minutes, only one minute off his Catalina to the mainland record. His total time was 16 hours and 42 minutes. Mickey Pittman estimated he swam forty-one miles.<sup>102</sup>

It was an amazing show of perseverance after his 1977 failure. York emerged from the Catalina Channel with the men's single records in both directions and the record for the overall double crossing.

By the end of 1978, the Orca Marathon Swim Club virtually split up. Each of the original members had gone off in his or her own direction. Syndi Goldenson had taken over as Orca coach when Albrecht retired. She brought her experience as a coach and added her own marathon swimming knowledge to that.<sup>103</sup>

Tami Lavachek began ocean training in 1978 with Albrecht. In 1979 Goldenson prepared her for Catalina. She was eighteen. Lavachek entered the water at Doctor's Cove at 12:00 a.m. on August 2, 1979. The conditions were good; the water was flat. After 10 hours, 8 minutes, and 30 seconds she landed at Point Vicente. She became the third fastest female swimmer in that direction.<sup>104</sup>

The last swim of the Seventies was accomplished on September 3, 1979. Chuck Hosmer, a thirty-two year old American Airlines pilot, had wanted to swim Catalina since his youth. Hosmer had no coach and trained by himself in a pool; yet he swam Catalina in just over 12 hours. Instead of hiring a sixty foot boat like Mickey Pittman's, Hosmer was accompanied by a small motor launch. He had only two paddlers but one was John York. There were no other people aboard. York made sure he followed all the "unofficial" Channel rules, nonetheless.<sup>106</sup>

Hosmer, as so many other swimmers, set out to accomplish his goal. His training and objectives were different than most of the other swimmers of the seventies but he was successful.

As the Seventies came to a close sixteen swimmers had successfully braved the Catalina Channel. There had been twenty-nine crossings; this was more than there had been in the first fifty-four years of successful swims. The women's single record from the mainland to Catalina was broken by Lynne Cox in 1974 and rebroken by Penny Lee Dean in 1976. The time was 7 hours, 15 minutes and 55 seconds and was the overall record for men and women in either direction.

In the other direction, Greta Andersen's 1958 single record was broken by Mary Beth Colpo in 1977 and reset three weeks later by Penny Lee Dean.

The men's record from Catalina to the mainland was set by David Cox in 1972 and beaten/tied by John York in 1976. In the other direction John York broke Tom Park's 1956 record by 39 minutes in 1977 and bettered this in 1978 by 49 minutes. This established the men's record at 7 hours and 51 minutes.

In 1977 Penny Lee Dean broke Greta Andersen's 1958 double crossing by 6 hours and 50 minutes. Then Cindy Cleveland established a women's double record in the opposite direction. Dan Slosberg and John York became the first men to swim the double

crossing to Catalina in 1978. York holds the overall record of 16 hours, 42 minutes.

Besides these records Stacy Fresonke, fourteen, and Andy Taylor, twelve, became the youngest female and male to cross the Channel, while Greta Andersen, forty-five, became the oldest female in 1972.

With the swims of the Seventies every Catalina speed record was rewritten and a variety of new records were established. The changes in training, the emphasis on pool training and development of the marathon team helped to account for these improvements. At the end of 1979 thirty-four swimmers had crossed the Catalina Channel and there had been fifty-three successful crossings.