

The Ultimate Virtual Survival Swim (29 Miles)

Why don't many people like to participate in open water swimming? Probably the two biggest reasons are the cold water, and fear of dangerous marine life. This virtual swim is designed to confront and overcome both those fears. Every day you survive is a good day in this virtual swim that takes place (virtually) in the waters of Northern California.



It's a very simple swim. You start at Alcatraz Island (left) in the middle of San Francisco Bay. You begin to swim.

Many swimmers start from Alcatraz, and there are enthusiasts who have done that swim over 100 times (see <http://www.alcatraz100.com/> for more information about the Alcatraz 100 Club). But that is going to San Francisco. You are aiming directly for the Golden Gate Bridge—which is a short swim of about 2 miles. (<http://www.sfgate.com/liveviews/> is a link to several webcams including the Golden Gate so you can monitor its condition).



Once at the Golden Gate, you swim directly for 27 miles until you reach the Farallon



Islands (if you do). Only one swimmer has ever actually done this swim, Stewart Evans, and he did the reverse course and a slightly shorter one. In 1967, he swam from the Farallon Islands to Point Bolinas (20 miles north of San Francisco). According to the website of the Dolphin Club, his swim of 19.57 miles began at 10:17 pm on August 27 and finished at 12 pm the next afternoon, with water temperatures ranging between 56 to 58 degrees. Several pilot rowboats and other craft accompanied him, but you are going to be all alone. Except for anyone else who is sharing the pool with you.



Every day you are doing this swim, plan on taking a warm shower afterwards to restore your body temperature from the chill. While Stewart Evans enjoyed unusually balmy water, the more likely water temperatures while you are swimming, would be a high of 56 and a low of closer to 50.

Every day when you are doing this swim, watch for dangerous marine life. And not just the kind wearing paddles and not watching their recovery. Although they can be dangerous too.

And not the kinds holding sticks(<http://www.sj-sharks.com/>).



And not the kind who are singing in Westside Story. The kind that you really don't want to see in the water are like this big guy to the right.

The waters off central California that you are swimming through on this Ultimate Virtual Survivor Swim offer a rich bounty of food for white sharks, and every summer and fall they actively feed in near shore areas. The Farallon Islands is a national wildlife refuge and is a common feeding ground for the sharks. Four species of pinnipeds, the northern elephant seal, the California sea lion, the Steller sea lion, and the harbor seal, live around and breed on these islands, making a plentiful food resource for the white sharks. There are groups that visit the islands for recreation who report regularly seeing sharks which range in size from 15 to 20 feet(http://www.incredible-adventures.com/sharks_farallons.html).



Putting aside media sensationalism, the reality of shark attacks in California and in the United States is that more people are killed by dogs annually than by sharks over the last 100 years. And its not even worth comparing the risk of driving without seatbelts or cigarette smoking or not using car seats for infants. But when you are swimming to the Farallon Islands, you can forget all those statistics if you choose to do so. Remember, however, that if you do encounter a great white shark(as unlikely as that may seem in the course of your virtual swim), they are a protected species in the State of California, entitled to legal protections since 1992 and as the Farallon Islands are a National Wildlife Refuge—do not hurt the shark or you may face legal consequences under both state and federal law.



Farallon Islands

Enjoy your swim, and record your yardage until you have overcome any remaining discomfort regarding cold water and dangerous marine life.

This swim was created by William Ireland of SCAQ. A search of the Internet will get you connected with the swims actually staged in San Francisco Bay.