

Virtual Swim around Manhattan Island

Steve Newman, Metropolitan LMSC, the Manhattan Island Foundation, and the USMS Fitness Committee bring you this virtual swim around Manhattan Island. The 28.5 mile Manhattan Island Marathon Swim is a premier long-distance swim race, drawing competitors from around the world.

Event History

The Manhattan Island Marathon Swim is a fixture on the open water swim calendar and a dramatic symbol of the improving quality of the waterways that surround New York City. The Swim's 22-year history spans an era of intense and largely successful efforts to clean up New York-area waterways. It was only natural that the Swim's promoters would gradually forge alliances with a wide range of environmental groups.

Drury Gallagher, a New York entrepreneur, investment banker and swimming enthusiast who had been an All-American at Fordham University in the late 1950s, organized the first Marathon Swim in 1982. Gallagher envisioned the event as a way to promote long-distance swimming to the Eastern seaboard, and to make the public aware of competitive swimming at times other than the Olympics.



Course Description

The Swim course circumnavigates the island of Manhattan. The course is marked by 4 check points: at Hell Gate, where the East River meets the Harlem; Spuyten Duyvil, where the Harlem and the Hudson Rivers meet; the 79th Street Boat Basin on the Hudson River; and Pier 26 in Hudson River Park. Swimmers who fail to arrive at the checkpoints before the designated cut-off times are at risk of fighting a changing current, and are pulled from the course.

First Leg – The Battery and the East River: Swimmers enter the water at South Cove in Battery Park City, and swim around the Battery. [They proceed up the East River, past South Street Seaport and Lower Manhattan, under the Brooklyn Bridge, Manhattan Bridge and Williamsburg Bridge. At 23rd Street, on the Manhattan side of the river, swimmers watch for float planes taking off and landing.

The Swimmers continue up the East River, past the United Nations, through the

West Channel (Manhattan side), past Roosevelt Island. Swimmers are advised to keep to the Manhattan side of the Channel as they swim up the East River. Finally, swimmers pass Gracie Mansion, home to – some of – New York’s mayors.

Second Leg: Swimmers then head towards the leftmost stanchion on the footbridge at the entrance to the Harlem River at Hell Gate. This is their first check point. Once they have entered the Harlem River, they will stay to their left. The swimmers take all bridges on their leftmost channel, allowing enough room for the Circle Line and other boat traffic to pass. On the right side, in the Bronx, they will pass the House That Ruth Built, home to the New York Yankees for over 75 years. Swimmers will also swim under High Bridge, part of the Croton Aqueduct system, which brings the city its drinking water.

Third Leg: At Spuyten Duyvil, where the Harlem River joins the Hudson River, the swimmers have their second check point. They head down the Hudson River towards the George Washington Bridge, staying about one-third of the way from the Manhattan side. After coming under the bridge and past the Little Red Lighthouse, the swimmers must stay out from shore so that they are not swept into the sewage treatment plant which protrudes out about a quarter of a mile. This plant spans 10 blocks, from 145th to 135th Street.

The swimmers continue down the Hudson River on the Manhattan side. Their third check point is opposite the 79th Street Boat Basin, near the end of Riverside Park. As they come down the Hudson River, the swimmers must be careful of boats coming out of the piers, including cruise ships and ocean liners, especially between 50th and 23rd streets. Swimmers are not allowed to swim closer than 20 yards to any pier. At 44th Street, swimmers will get a unique look at the USS Intrepid, now a museum, as they swim past.

The skyline of Lower Manhattan once again appears as swimmers approach their fourth check point, just to the north of the World Financial Center. The swimmers then swim along the seawall and turn into South Cove. They will sprint by the cheering crowds to the finish.

About the Foundation

The Manhattan Island Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that brings the sport of swimming to New York City's unique waterways. Through its various open water races and programs, the Foundation celebrates the ongoing recovery of the city's rivers. Its signature event is the annual Manhattan Island Marathon Swim, one of the most prestigious open-water marathons anywhere in the world. For more information about the Manhattan Island Foundation and its events, visit www.nycswim.org.

Keep track of your progress using one of the Virtual Swim Series Recording Charts. All of your swimming mileage counts towards your goal of swimming around Manhattan Island. A mile is equivalent to 1760 yards or 1600 meters. Enjoy the sight and sounds of this great city.

This swim was created by Steven Newman, who swims for Badger Masters and is Chairman of the Metropolitan LMSC, in New York. In 2003, Steve was the Virtual Swim Series Mileage Champion, logging 583.75 miles. He envisioned this swim while swimming others in the 2003 series.

This is an arial picture of Manhattan Island.

