



# VIRTUAL SWIM ALONG THE POTOMAC



The Potomac River holds a colorful place in our nation's history, and continues to function as an important part of the capital region. This 19-mile virtual swim begins in northwest Washington, DC, and passes historic sites, offers breathtaking views of our country's national monuments, and ends on the Virginia shore at the home of our first president.

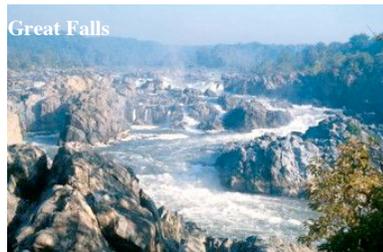
## ★THE RIVER★

The Potomac River forms boundaries for West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. It is born in the mountain springs of West Virginia, flows north and east, eventually turning south to empty into the Chesapeake Bay.

You will be swimming the tidal Potomac. The river at sea level rises and falls behind the tides. With the current at your back, be careful. It can be strong, swift, and swirling after rains and in the spring, making a swim difficult. But there are times, especially on quiet, lazy summer mornings, when the surface becomes a natural mirror, reflecting the city's skyline. This is the best time to swim.

## ★THE COURSE★

1 We begin at Fletcher's Boathouse along the historic C&O Canal, now a national park. The canal was constructed in the 1800's to circumvent the river's falls just to the north and to provide continuing water transportation to the inland frontier. We descend the steep bank to enter the water and begin our swim.



2 After swimming 1-1/2 miles, we see the spires of Georgetown University visible on the hilltop. Be careful to swim around the university and high school rowing clubs, and mind their lane markers in the water. Georgetown was a trading and shipping town in existence prior to the creation of the District of Columbia and was located at the furthest navigable deep shipping channel upstream. Four Masters clubs now call Washington, DC home: DCRP Masters, DC Masters, DC Aquatics Club, and National Capital YMCA. We now pass Thompson's Boathouse and its kayakers departing for a quick trip around Roosevelt Island.

3 To the left is the infamous Watergate complex with its hotel, offices, and residences and next door, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Patrons wave to you from its riverfront promenade. Breathing on the right side, the Virginia shoreline is visible with joggers and bicyclists on the Mount Vernon Trail. This paved trail extending 14 miles along riverbank parkland to Mt. Vernon provides important recreation to residents, and offers spectacular views of the monuments across the river.



Memorial Bridge from Arlington Cemetery

4 To the right is the famous Iwo Jima Marine Corps Memorial on the hill. After four miles your left is presented with one of the most photographed vistas in America. The Lincoln Memorial stands along the bank with the Washington Monument rising majestically in the background. Suddenly another bridge with classical Beaux Arts decoration and graceful arches passes overhead. Ceremonial Arlington Memorial Bridge connects the Lincoln Memorial with Arlington National Cemetery on the Virginia side.



Arlington

5 Arlington was Robert E. Lee's house until the Civil War. The Union seized it, burying war casualties on the



grounds to prevent the southern general from returning after the war. His estate was later made a national cemetery and his hilltop home still prominently stands overlooking the city across the river. Arlington County is also home to Arlington Ageless Masters.

**6** Over your left shoulder, you glimpse the [Jefferson Memorial](#) peeping up above a pink cloud of hundreds of cherry trees in blossom along the river. But now your bucolic swim changes. Watch out for those patrol boats! With terrorism a concern, the Harbor Patrol on the river keeps a watchful eye on the bridges and on the [Pentagon](#), which is coming into view on your right. Roaring overhead are jets banking on their final approach to [Reagan Washington National Airport](#). Following the river, they are not allowed to fly directly over the White House or Washington. Cannons boom in the background in an attempt to frighten birds away from airport operations.



Jefferson Memorial

**7** The water becomes murkier and the floating twigs and leaves give way to floating signs of development. The 10 mile long Anacostia River flows into the Potomac, carrying with it all the contaminants and debris associated with urban runoff. Instead of monuments and trees, the Naval Research Lab, hangars for White House helicopters, and the city's sewage treatment plant now pass by on the Washington side.

**8** The Virginia side finds the Washington Sailing Marina, with its fleet of Sunfish filled with urbanites taking sailing lessons. They do not venture far into the river to bother your swim.

**9** After swimming for nine miles, you come upon an old settlement with brick sidewalks, cobblestone streets, and quaint shops. This is [Old Town Alexandria](#), the second historic colonial seaport city you encounter on your swim. Its old homes and stores are still providing the services they did when George Washington shopped, ate, and partied there. It is also home to Alexandria Masters Swimming.



Alexandria



Jones Point Lighthouse

**10** Above you is the congested Wilson Bridge, struggling to carry Interstate 95 traffic between Maine and Florida, as well as Virginia and Maryland. Construction cranes and barges abound, forcing you to swim detours around them. The bridge is being replaced by a new 12-lane span scheduled for completion years from now. Amidst all this stands the historic [Jones Point Lighthouse](#) that was constructed in 1856 to warn of the sand bars on the Potomac.

**11** Trees and nature once again line both banks of the river, as it spreads to almost a mile in width. Heron and egrets replace bridge piers at the protected [Dyke Marsh](#) sanctuary in Virginia. Waterfowl are given this small refuge close to the larger areas set aside further downstream. Bird watchers mistake you for a sighting, and momentarily train their binoculars on you. To your left you spot what they came to see - the bald eagle pair that made the Maryland shore their home. [River Farm](#), the historic property of the American Horticulture Society headquarters with its gardens along the Potomac comes up at the 13 mile point.



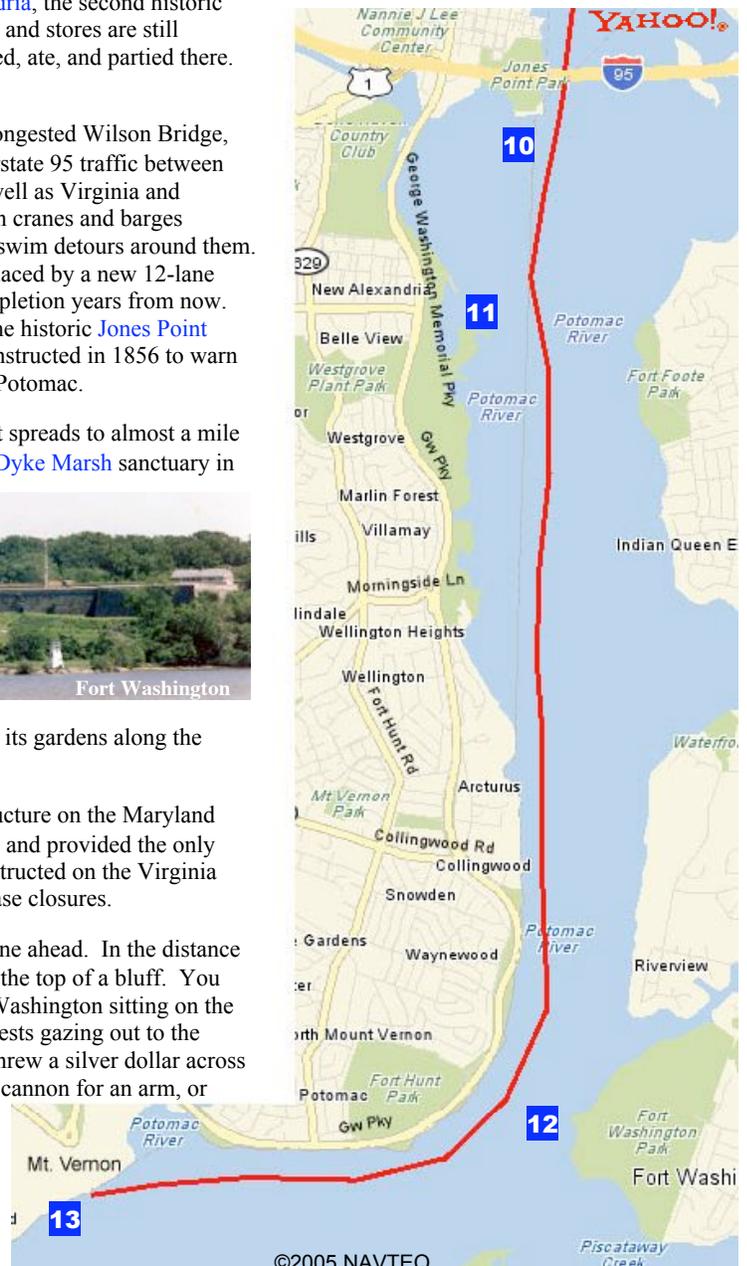
Fort Washington

**12** Behind the sail of a passing vessel you spot a large stone structure on the Maryland hillside. [Fort Washington](#) was constructed after the War of 1812 and provided the only protection of our capital until the Civil War. [Fort Hunt](#) was constructed on the Virginia side about 100 years later in 1904, and became one of the first base closures.

**13** The wide river now turns to the west as you spot the finish line ahead. In the distance stands George Washington's stately [Mount Vernon](#) plantation at the top of a bluff. You can almost picture General Washington sitting on the veranda with his frequent guests gazing out to the river. (It is not true that he threw a silver dollar across the Potomac unless he had a cannon for an arm, or liked throwing away a lot of money.) Congratulations. Your 19 mile journey along one of American's most famous waterways is now complete.



Mount Vernon



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## ★REFERENCES★

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Mount Vernon	<a href="http://www.mountvernon.org/">http://www.mountvernon.org/</a>

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The Virtual Swim Along The Potomac was developed by Ray Novitske who swims with Alexandria Masters Swimming, and included assistance and support from Ann Svenson of DC Masters.