

Swimmer Profile – Chris Greene

By Elaine Krugman



If you participate in the Go the Distance (GTD) challenge each year like I do, you keep track of your daily swim yardage online in a Fitness Log (FLOG). As USMS describes the program, “GTD is a self-directed event intended to encourage Masters swimmers to regularly exercise and track their progress. There’s no time limit for the distance milestones, except that they must be achieved in the calendar year. Speed doesn’t count—just the effort to attain whatever goal you set for yourself.”

The most I have ever swum in a year was 454.28 miles in 2012, when I was 50. Chris Greene, on the other hand, swam 1,795.06 miles in 2018, and we are the same age!

He didn’t just accomplish that goal in 2018; he also swam

more than the highest GTD milestone of 1,500 miles each of the past five years. Since he started participating in the program, he has placed 3rd in the country and 1st in Georgia each year.

In order to put in that kind of annual mileage, you have to be dedicated, and Chris has been a dedicated swimmer since joining a YMCA age group team at the age of five. When he was fifteen, Chris was given the opportunity to attend Mercersburg Academy, an internationally known prep school for swimming and academics. While attending the school, he was a member of relay teams that set a National Prep Relay record and two National Championships.

During the summer of 1979, before Chris’s senior year, he trained with a Ft. Lauderdale team to prepare him for his final high school season.

“My senior year at Mercersburg, I eventually narrowed my college choices to UC Santa Barbara and West Point, I clearly knew what I wanted. I chose West Point, but I found out pretty quickly that I wasn’t ready to grow up yet,” Chris said, adding that he discovered that the best place for him was swimming at Penn State, specializing in fly and the 400 IM.

Soon after graduating from Penn State, Chris joined USMS and started a Masters team at a Boston area YMCA. He also helped coach the youth swim team.

The last few years Chris has gotten away from pool racing and, as he described it, “...kind of fell into marathon swimming. I did open water swimming—the 10K’s and the 5K’s—and then I did a swim called the Rat Race in Chattanooga. A high school teammate of mine coaches and does that race. He told me about Swim the Suck (a 10-mile open-water swim in the Tennessee River Gorge), and that’s how it happened.” Chris had always enjoyed open-water swimming and had participated in the Clemson open-water swim for several years. When he competed in the Swim the Suck, in October of 2015, there were marathon swimming meet directors from all over the world promoting their events. Chris entered a drawing to participate in the S.C.A.R. event and learned his name was chosen for the four-day lake race in Arizona.



The race took place in four different lakes (Saguaro, Canyon, Apache, and Roosevelt) and totaled 41.5 miles, including a 10K night swim. The third day, a 17-mile swim, the headwinds were so strong that the kayak escorts couldn't keep up with the swimmers. The conditions were so turbulent that Chris was one of only nine finishers. "That was the hardest thing I have ever done, but I had so much fun." The avid swimmer enjoyed the experience so much that he returned two years later to compete again. Although his name wasn't chosen in the drawing, fellow Georgia Masters swimmer (and previous Swimmer Profile subject) Pat Eddy's name was drawn. As it turned out, Pat was unable to participate, so he spoke with the meet director and had his entry transferred to Chris.

"As soon as I finished my first S.C.A.R., I read about a race that Darren Miller was putting on in Pittsburgh. (Darren Miller was the first swimmer to complete the Oceans 7, a series of seven long-distance open-water swims that is considered marathon swimming's most difficult challenge.)" Chris explained that each swimmer had to be approved by Darren to participate in the race he was organizing. Three Rivers Marathon Swim, as it came to be known, is a 30K swim that raises money and gives 100% of the swim's profits to a local charity, the Forever Fund. Chris swam the race in 2015 and completed the course in 8:35:50.

In addition to those open-water events, Chris has swum in a race across Lake Tahoe, which straddles the state line between California and Nevada, one at Lake George, New York, and a race around Mercer Island, in Seattle.

Although Chris is considering other marathon swims to do in the future, including Swim Across the Sound, in Long Island, New York, he doesn't have his sights set on conquering the English Channel. As he explained, "I would love to do the English Channel, but the problem is the cost. I have a daughter that just started college. You can get over there and you have a window of three days and you might not even swim [due to unsafe conditions]."

One marathon swim Chris will definitely do late this summer is at Seneca Lake, 55 years after his sister water skied the 38-mile-long lake. She recently passed from pancreatic cancer, and Chris will be swimming in her honor.

Curious about how this marathon swimmer prepares for the rigors of a race, I asked Chris about his training. "A lot of marathon swimming is in fairly cold water, and I have worked on acclimating myself to that. Now, I really like swimming in cold water." Instead of training in heated indoor pools in the winter, this polar bear prefers swimming in open-water or unheated outdoor pools, seeking them out when he travels for his work. If he is able to, Chris swims every day and will only take a day off if travel prevents him from finding somewhere to swim. Even then, this dedicated athlete will work out on an elliptical machine rather than do nothing. He also supplements his swims with elliptical workouts twice per week.

On a typical weekday, Chris will swim 6-7,000 yards depending on how much time he has available. It's not all just freestyle swimming, though; Chris sometimes likes to swim butterfly as part of his workouts. Every year, he also swims his age in 50-yard fly repeats on a one-minute interval. Whew!

Chris's training regimen has prepared him well to compete in marathon swimming events; however, I wondered how he approached it mentally. "I'm used to swimming for hours. That's why I sometimes just go

ahead and swim for five or six hours, so that it's not out of the ordinary [for me]. It helps mentally getting ready for [a marathon swim].”

What does this endurance swimmer think about when he competes? “If it's a group swim, one of the things I think about is I kind of negative split those races. When I did that 36-mile race, 30 people swam it, and I passed 15 people in the second half-- one person with just 100 yards to go.” This fierce competitor also thinks about what percentage of the race he has completed and when his next feeding will be. “Sometimes, when it's nice and sunny, I just think about how lucky I am to be able to do it,” Chris said.

The gratitude this appreciative swimmer feels has deepened since a health scare he experienced after the Three Rivers Marathon Swim. “Two weeks after the Pittsburgh swim, I was traveling, and I started feeling my legs hurt. I thought maybe it was the flu, but I never get the flu. I was sore, and I was feeling kind of out of it, and I didn't know what was going on.” After returning home, Chris went to the doctor and had blood work done. Ultimately, he was diagnosed with Weil's disease, a severe version of leptospirosis, which is a serious bacterial infection that he probably contracted from contaminated water. The infection affected his liver, caused severe flu-like symptoms, and a horrible rash. The infection was so serious that it landed Chris in the hospital for twelve days. He lost twenty-five pounds and was very weak. “I literally went from a 30-mile swim to not being able to walk— in two weeks.” Chris lamented.

Fortunately, the determined swimmer recovered in time to achieve his goal of competing in the Swim the Suck open-water race, just six weeks after his illness. Out of 87 total swimmers, Chris placed 20th.

Besides participating in an occasional pool meet, this enthusiastic open-water swimmer hasn't looked back on his days of pool swimming and doesn't have much interest in returning to pool competition. “One of the reasons I got in this and got away from pool swimming is that pool races are the same. Pool swimming is the same length, and all I'm doing is getting slower every year. Open-water swimming is more like golfing where there are no two golf courses the same, and you're not really competing against what you did when you were young. In fact, it's something I have never done before. It's different every time.”

Another aspect of marathon swimming that Chris enjoys the most is the camaraderie between the swimmers.

The former pool swimmer still enjoys training in a pool, however, if that is his only option. “One of the things I like the most [about Masters] is that it gets my adrenaline going, because when I travel and join another Masters group, I'm very competitive. The most fun one I did was with Stanford Masters. I also got to swim in Michael Phelps's pool up in Baltimore,” Chris said.

For swimmers interested in trying open-water racing, Chris recommends entering the Rat Race, in Chattanooga (<https://chattanooga-swimfest.org/>). “It's a real fun one, it's low-key, you don't even need a kayaker with you, it's about 4-1/2 miles down-river, and they have a little lunch afterwards. It's a good one to see what it feels like, because I like point-to-point open-water swimming a lot better than swimming in circles around buoys. That was the first point-to-point race that I did, and that's when I finally realized why I liked [open-water swimming] so much.”

Another suggestion Chris made was to check out the discussion forum on the Marathon Swimmers Federation website: <https://forum.marathonswimmers.org/>

Finally, as a swimmer who has dabbled in some open-water racing at the Georgia Games Open Water Meet and thoroughly enjoyed competing in (relatively short!) 3K and 1K races, I was curious what motivated Chris to train and swim marathons. As he explained, “It's relaxing and fun; and, you kind of get away from everything. You don't have your cell phone with you; you can kind of just get lost in your thoughts and daydream. It also makes me feel really good when I'm finished. I just like it!