

South End Rowing Club NEW MEMBER SWIM GUIDE

The below is designed to help new members in having an enjoyable and safe swim experience in the beautiful San Francisco Bay. As a South End swimmer, you will have lots of fun, and many learning experiences...

Some Basic Rules and Etiquette

While we don't consider ourselves an uptight, stuffy club, there are some basic rules and etiquette to be aware of.

- Only club members are able to participate in out-of-cove swims, ride in the zodiacs and use kayaks or any of the other club boats. This is a rule that we take very seriously, as our insurance policies cover only members in good standing.
- Swimmers should always wear a yellow cap when participating in an out-of-cove swim with the club.
- Always listen to the pilots. If you are swimming out in the Bay and a pilot tells you to head in a certain direction or tells you that you need to be pulled into the boat, you must always listen and do as they say. Safety is very important to us and pilots are often aware of things that swimmers are not.
- Swimmers should not do out-of-cove swims without a pilot!! Pilots are there to ensure that swimmers are safe and can be pulled from the water should anything go wrong. This rule applies to everyone!! Even the strongest of swimmers may not be able to get out of the way of an approaching speedboat or tanker. Getting hit by a boat of any sort es no bueno. (Note: Some swimmers to swim without a pilot to/from Fort Mason. This is "legal," but definitely done at one's own risk.)
- While we encourage fun, crazy, wacky adventures, we ask that before embarking on said adventures, members always ask themselves, "What could go wrong with this idea?"
- After a swim that has involved zodiac usage, it is very nice for swimmers to help pull the boat onto the dock before heading to the shower. It is also nice for swimmers to come out and help dry and put away the boats after their shower.
- Never jump or dive off of something when you are not sure what lies below!!

Organized (and semi-organized) Swims

There are four main types of organized (or semi-organized) swims at our club. They are Sunriser Swims, Club Swims, Long Swims and Sundowner Swims.

- Sunriser Swims

The Sunrisers are a group of swimmers who meet up at Sunrise for an early morning, before work, swim in the Bay. The meeting spot is in the Day Room, typically around 6am on weekdays and 7am on weekends.

A calendar of piloted Sunriser swims is prepared each month and is available on the club website. On these days, club members can expect that at least one boat will be going out for an out-of-cove swim – Pier 7, Pier 39, Coghlan Beach, Yacht Harbor, Alcatraz, maybe even the Bay Bridge.

Upon arriving at the club, swimmers should sign their names into the log book located just outside the kitchen. Upon finishing a Sunriser swim, each swimmer should remember to cross their names OFF the list so that everyone knows they have made it back safely.

Some days, there is not enough room in the boats to take everyone to “the jump.” On these days, some members may group up and drive to the starting spot. Occasionally, there may be more swimmers than can safely be piloted. On these days, some swimmers may need to simply hang back and opt for an in-cove swim.

Often times, there is only one zodiac piloting the swim and quite a range of speeds amongst the swimmers. In these instances, faster swimmers may need to do a little bit of swimming in circles. That is, if they get fairly far ahead, they may need to swim back toward the zodiac and the group before again swimming toward their final destination. For safety purposes is important that the zodiac pilot is able to see all swimmers!

On mornings when no out-of-cove swim is planned, members still meet up and go out for an in-cove swim. There is lots of fun to be had inside the cove, so don't hesitate to show up on these days.

- Club Swims

Club Swims are very fun!!! These are festive, semi-competitive events open to all club members. The cost is usually in the neighborhood of \$10 and typically includes a post-swim meal in our wonderful cookshack. Guests may attend post-swim meals for a small fee.

In addition to being open only to the SERC members, USMS membership is required for participation in a club swim. Of course, yellow caps are also required.

Dates and times of the Club Swims are posted on the club website, but are subject to change. The best way to stay updated is to read the postings on Google Groups. If you are planning on participating in a club swim, you should check Google Groups the evening before for an updated timeline. Timelines DO sometimes change based on the information gathered in the test swim.

- Long Swims

Long Swims are designed as tougher swims, for those members looking for an extra challenge. Point Bonita, Candlestick Park and Round Trip Alcatrazes are some popular long swims. Those participating in a long swim should be reasonably confident that they can finish the swim. Some of the long swims actually have qualifying standards that must be met.

Costs for long swims vary. Those swims requiring the rental of a "big boat" are typically more expensive than your average swim. Sometimes, pre-payment for the club swims is required.

For safety purposes, it is often required that swimmers "pod up" during all or part of a long swim. If this is the case, swimmers should stay with their group of swimmers as instructed.

Long swims are also open only to club members and require USMS membership and a yellow cap.

Dates and times of the Long Swims are posted on the club website, but are also subject to change. Again, one should read the Google Groups postings to stay abreast of updated timelines.

- Sundowner Swims

Sundowner swims are the least formal of the South End "organized" swims. In fact, they are really only partially organized.

When the weather gets nice, a club member may send a post to the Google Groups list serve announcing a Sundowner Swim (and maybe asking for a volunteer pilot). These swims typically happen on Friday evenings around 5 or 5:30pm, before a Club Happy Hour.

If you head out for a Sundowner Swim, expect a fun time – and also potentially a lot of chop!!! The winds pick up in the afternoon and evenings!

Finding People With Whom to Swim

If you know how long it takes you to swim a mile – in an open water lake or in a pool, you can say use that time as a marker and ask others if they swim the same speed. Alternately, if you know you might do 100 yard repeats on a certain interval in the pool, you can quote that time.

If you are not sure of your pool times, the best thing to do is likely to show up for a Sunriser swim on a morning that there is no “out of cove” swim planned. You can find some people with whom to do an inside the cove swim and see how you fare.

Understanding the Tides

Tides books are made available each year to South End members to use as guides when planning swims. One should look at the “Currents at the Golden Gate Entrance” section. Remember that the tides at the Golden Gate Bridge are close to an hour behind the tides at Alcatraz & Aquatic Park. SO, it is usually best to subtract about an hour (assuming your swim is happening around Alcatraz or Aquatic Park). Online, you can find information on tides at the gate at:

http://wolfweb.unr.edu/homepage/edc/tides/2011/sfbe_fr11.html

The below site shows the current right Alcatraz. So, no adjustments are needed.

<http://www.mobilegeographics.com:81/locations/98.html>

During a Flood Tide, the water is moving into the Bay, toward and beyond the Bay Bridge.

During an Ebb Tide, the water is moving out of the Bay, toward the Golden Gate Bridge.

At Slack Tide, the water is change directions and shouldn't really be moving too much one way or the other.

For a “with the current” swim, you will get the best “ride” if you jump about 30 minutes before max tide. For a cross current swim, you will have the highest chance of success if you jump about 30 minutes before the slack tide.

The velocity of the ebb and flood tides are noted in the tide books and on the above mentioned websites.

- A 1-2 knot current is not too strong (though you'll still feel it!)
- A 2-3 knot current is medium strength
- A 3-4 knot current is QUITE strong
- A current over 4 knot is VERY strong!!

Catching the Current

Though there are exceptions, most of the out-of-cove swims are done with the current. Assuming this the case, you may want to position yourself so as to "get the best push." This typically means swimming out a little bit to catch the tide (and not hugging the shore).

Keep in mind that if you have swum out a bit to catch a current, you will want to prepare to swim back shore. Plenty of swimmers have been out a ways, enjoying a great push, only find themselves suddenly swept past the opening into Aquatic Park (where we typically finish our swims).

Difficulty of Swims

- Green

Pier 39, *Coghlan Beach* and *Gas House Cove* are probably the "easiest" swims in that they are all relatively short. Done with a current pushing the swimmer, they would be the equivalent of a "green run" on a ski slope. These are excellent starter swims. Even strong swimmers are encouraged to start with these swims – just to get a feel for the water.

- Blue (Reasonable)

Pier 7, *Yacht Harbor* and *Anita Rock* are considered medium-length swims. Done with a current pushing the swimmer, they would be very reasonable "blue" ski runs.

- Blue (More Challenging)

An *Alcatraz* swim is a cross-current swim and can be inherently more difficult for some swimmers. If it is timed just right on a slack current, an Alcatraz can be a "blue run" kind of swim. However, there have been plenty of instances in which swimmers have had to fight a current and have been unable to "make the opening" into Aquatic Park.

The Golden Gate Bridge swim is another cross-current swim, possibly a little more challenging than an Alcatraz. Water is usually rougher at the Golden Gate and, if a swimmer gets pushed west, they will find themselves out in the middle of the ocean.

The Bay Bridge, Pac Bell Park and Crissy Field, GG Bridge to Club swims are all solid swims in terms of distance. With a current pushing the swimmer, they are more challenging "blue run" kinds of swims.

- Black Diamond

Point Bonita, Kirby Cove, Candlestick Park and a "Round Trip Alcatraz" are all longer swims that would likely qualify as "expert runs" if one were on a ski slope.

Piloting

All of the piloting that goes on in support of the swims at the clubs is on a volunteer basis. While it is true that a few members do enjoy piloting as an activity in itself, many of the pilots are supporting a swim because they realize that if everyone pitches in a little, all will run smoothly and we'll all get to swim a bunch and pilot a little.

Sitting in a pilot boat (or a kayak) and helping support a swim can actually be a great way to improve your own Bay swimming! Things look different from above and you can really see the mistakes people make.

Driving a zodiac does take a bit of practice. Pilot clinics are run throughout the year in order to train new pilots. Co-pilots are most always welcome though and this is a good way to spend some time in the zodiac, observing how everything works.

Kayaking does not take a lot of experience – and is also very enjoyable! Feel free to jump in! You should wear a life vest, of course.

