

Remembering the Boy Scout Mile Swim



Courtesy of BSA

> It was the summer of '69. Astronauts were walking on the moon. Crowds were gathering at Woodstock. But at a southern New Hampshire Boy Scout camp, 18-year-old nature counselor Brian Stack was banned from the waterfront for two excruciating weeks—all because he could swim the Boy Scout mile faster than the chaplain. Well, actually, it wasn't quite that innocent, admits Stack, now head coach for Manatee Aquatic Masters in Oakland, Calif.

"I loved the waterfront. I would do the mile swim every week with the younger kids," recalls Stack, who could go the distance in about 25 minutes. "The chaplain was a very slow swimmer, but he had been wanting me to swim the mile with him. So we started out with our escort boat, and I

thought, 'this is going to take two hours.' We had to go out and around an island, so when I rounded the island, I said, 'enough of this,' and I swam back alone." But waiting on the shoreline was one angry director who promptly bounced Stack from the waterfront for failing to stay with the escort and ignoring scouting safety measures. "I couldn't swim. I couldn't take a boat out. It was like being in prison," he remembers. "It hurt a lot." But some 37 years later, Stack—who enjoys a broken 1650 these days—says, with only the slightest of hesitations, that his punishment was "really the right thing to do."

Not every youth relished the Boy Scout mile as much as Stack. Ken Mange and Randy Nutt remember the swim as looming large on their teen horizon. Mange, who had just

begun to swim on his junior high team in Lansing, Mich., spent his 13th summer at Arrowhead Lake Scout camp. "It didn't prepare you for the distance," he says of his lap swimming practices. "So by the midpoint of the swim, I was getting tired." The lake that looked small from the dock took on a much larger dimension. "The image of the rowboat transom is still etched in memory because I followed that old rowboat tenaciously," Mange recounts.

Nutt earned his patch at age 12 by navigating a "murky" central Florida lake in 1971, trying hard not to think about alligators. "It was probably one of the first goals that I had set for myself—it was something I really wanted to do," he says. "That was a major accomplishment." As a Masters swimmer, distance is still his passion today, having completed swims

MILE MEMORIES

>>> The Boy Scouts of America Mile Swim is a rite of passage for preteens and teens each summer. They must explain how regular exercise contributes to good health and why swimming is one of the best forms of exercise. Scouts also must tell what precautions and procedures a swimmer and escort must follow for distance swimming over open water. Successful swimmers earn a BSA Mile Swim patch, which is worn on the left side of the swim trunks, and a wallet card certifying completion of 1600 meters.

>>> Masters swimmer Randy Nutt traces his passion for the open water to the Boy Scout mile. Today, he directs a number of open water events including the Bonaire EcoSwim, and operates an open water event site at www.aquamoonadventures.com.

>>> Ken Mange worked at Boy Scout summer camps for a number of years, swam during college and continues to be an "eager Masters swimmer now past 50." Remembering his first mile swim prompted him to write a first-person account of that long-ago summer. Read Mange's story at www.usmsswimmer.com.

>>> Brian Stack gave up scouting but started Masters swimming in 1982. "There's no way to get a mile out of me now," he jokes. Actually, his team, the Manatee Aquatic Masters, is gearing up for the 20th annual Manatee Open Water Relay Swim in Fremont, Calif., on Aug. 20.

Sources: U.S. Scouting Service Project Inc., www.usscouts.org

around Manhattan, Key West and the first 21-mile solo swim around Miami Beach. "Looking back, the highlights of my swimming career are centered around open water swimming goals—the first being the Scout mile," Nutt says. <<<