

Cables Keep You Straight and Narrow

> **D**espite the fact that cable swims were invented to keep swimmers headed in a straight line, the route to a definitive history of this unique subgroup of open water swimming events is anything but direct.

Some say the first real cable swim was at Chris Greene Lake near Charlottesville, Va., where local physician Jack Kegley, father of hall-of-fame marathon swimmer James Kegley, stretched a 440-yard (1/4-mile) rope between two pylons in 1969. James was just 11 then, and Dr. Kegley wanted his son to have a safe place to train. The pylon-and-cable installation was permanent, so Neil and Sue Shepherd, two other devoted Charlottesville swim

parents, started holding races at the site in 1971.

In July 1977, the Shepherds added a Masters heat, and this event, which attracted 16 swimmers, may have been the first official Masters cable swim. Two weeks later, the National Long Distance Swimming Championships, which including a 2-mile cable race for Masters, were held at Trout Lake in Menominee Falls, Wisc.

Others say that the cable swim idea dates back at least to 1957, when promoters staged the AAU Long Distance National at Huntington, Ind., along a cable set up in a flooded quarry pit called Lake Clare. Promoters of the event added a Masters' Mile during the mid-1970s, say event historians

Lynn and Anne Pittenger. Later, the race became known as the Glen S. Hummer Huntington Masters Mile after the late, legendary Huntington swim coach.

In the history of Masters swimming in the United States, there are only about a half dozen locations where Masters cable events have been conducted – at least according to the rules of U.S. Masters Swimming, which are in the USMS rule book at article 302.3.1.

“I have swum in other races that called themselves cable swims, but some of them were just a bunch of Clorox bottles tied to a rope that bowed out incredibly far in the wind,” says marathoner Kegley, who has held the all-time 2-mile cable record of 38:32 (set at Chris Greene Lake) since 1988.

Nonetheless, swims along the quarter-mile cable continue to play a vital role in record-keeping for open water competitions. The earliest cable swim record currently on the USMS books was set in 1978 by Illinois Masters swimmer Sam Kooistra, whose time of 23:11.86 is the fastest 1-mile for the 50-54 age group. Besides the three locations already mentioned, there have been USMS-sanctioned cable swims in Lake Placid, N.Y., and in Walter E. Long Lake in Austin, Texas.

“There aren't very many because cable swims are hard to do,” says Marcia Cleveland, chair of the USMS Open Water and Long Distance Committee. “It requires a lot of work to set one up and run it properly.” <<<

DEB MILAN BRUDVIG, of Fort Belvoir Swim Team Masters, provided the cable swim artwork. For licensing or purchase of her swim art, visit www.swimmuse.com.

SWIM STRAIGHT SANS CABLE

When there is no cable to guide you, there are ways to keep a relatively straight line in open water. Here are some tips we gathered from experienced open water swimmers. Also, if you get in trouble, don't be too proud to ask a race official for help.

>>> **Breathe on both sides.** Bilateral breathing won't guarantee symmetry, but it helps. Try breathing every third stroke.

>>> **Sighting.** A freestyle swimmer's head is underwater about 90 percent of the time, so many open water swimmers use a technique called “sighting.” Pick a stationary object onshore, like a tree or manmade structure that's in line with the race buoy, and head for that. Look up at regular intervals (maybe every 10 to 15 strokes) to check.

>>> **Get the rhythm.** Practicing an even stroke in the pool can help when a swimmer returns to open water. Ignore lane lines at first, then see how far off you are after a pool length. Adjust until you can swim straighter. Concentrate on pulling the same force with each arm.

>>> **Refine your kick.** Kick evenly and strongly, which increases speed, improves alignment and helps compensate for uneven strokes.

>>> **Think about it.** Imagine going in a straight line. Pretend you are an arrow headed straight for your target. These thoughts help keep your body streamlined.

>>> **Follow the leader.** If you're not going to win easily, or you plan to make your big move late in the race, then consider following someone else. Pick someone who is experienced and has about the same pace. Or wait until the group establishes a pace and rhythm, and pick someone who looks straight and steady.

