



Backgrounder

History

The Across The Lake Swim began in 1949 and is the longest running and largest annual open water event in Canada. It is also the last event left from the early Kelowna Regatta. The Kelowna Masters Swim Club took over the administration of the Across The Lake Swim from the City of Kelowna in 1986. Back then, the swim started at 6pm on a Friday and ended in City Park which was fenced off as part of the three day Regatta. Only one hundred swimmers participated in the swim. After the Kelowna Regatta ended in 1988 the swim was moved to Saturday morning. An accompanying canoe was mandatory and the swim became part of the (now folded) BC Open Water Swim Race Series.

The Kelowna Masters Swim Club had organized the Across the Lake Swim as part of its club activities. However, the surging growth and interest in open water swimming and the Across The Lake Swim mandated more dedicated attention than to just be part of any one swim club. Therefore the organizers created a non-profit society to promote the event and important skills involved in open water swimming. In 2009, the event became independently run, and its growth has gone from a couple of hundred swimmers to the 1000 swimmers expected in 2015. In these last seven years, the Across The Lake Swim Society (ATLSS) President Mark Fromberg and Race Director Peter Rudd have together crafted an event that sells out earlier every year despite increasing participation.

The ATLSS had its first annual general meeting in September 2010.

About the Swim

Although it was officially a race across Okanagan Lake, it was as much a rite of passage of young swimmers demonstrating their swimming skills, to prove that they could be thought of as safe by their parents when near the lake. Today, the Interior Savings Across the Lake Swim (ATLS) has developed a strong focus as a fun, family event with an even broader appeal, attracting all levels of swimmers, young and old alike. Many adults, who may be newcomers to swimming, cross it off their bucket list, while competitive swimmers still consider it as a race.

The fastest time for a male swimmer for the Interior Savings Across The Lake Swim is Roland Bauhart at 20:49, in 1997. The fastest time for a female swimmer for the Interior Savings Across The Lake Swim is Jeanne Carlson at 23:03, in 2011.

The Interior Savings Across the Lake Swim has been gaining popularity every year and is getting more international attention.

In 2014, there were over 900 swimmers registered, with almost 1200 expected in 2015. In 2015, the swim debuted on Openwaterpedia's Top 100 Open Water Swims in The World at #15.

Safety

The commitment to safety has always been the top priority. A comprehensive safety manual was created including multiple wave starts; emphasis on free open water training clinics for six weeks before the event, improved sighting markers, a white cap system for anxious swimmers, and dozens of paddlers and with more lifeguards paired up in powerboats on the water than any other known open water swim. This safety plan was put to the test and worked flawlessly in 2014 when an unusual current caused more than 200 swimmers to be pushed off course far enough to be rescued.

In 2014, we had close to 200 volunteers involved including 50 lifeguards, 15 kayaks, 20 powerboats, two RCMP boats, over 200 kayakers, canoeists and stand-up paddle boarders and a medical tent onsite – all helping to make the race safe.

Westbank First Nations (WFN)

It is hard not to feel good about participating in the event. In recent years, the ATLS has partnered with Westbank First Nations who have led the swim in their war canoe, and WFN Elder Grouse Barnes has blessed the swim each year. Thus the ATLS has fitting cultural symbolism, crossing Okanagan Lake from WFN land on the west to City land on the east.

Jan Morrow Award

Jan Morrow was a member of the Kelowna Masters Swim Club in the 1990's who was actively involved with the club's executive and as a regular master's swimmer. She was not a competitive swimmer, but loved to swim and successfully completed the Across the Lake Swim on a number of occasions. After she lost her battle with cancer, the Kelowna Masters Swim Club decided to name an annual award in her memory, to be awarded to a swimmer who demonstrates determination, inspiration and a positive attitude within the swimming community.

Giving back

The ATLS executive looks at swimming as a life skill. A portion of the registration fee helps to raise funds to teach swimming to school aged children in an attempt to drown-proof a generation. For the last several years, approximately 1500 third grade children in School District #23 get three weeks of free swim lessons, solely funded by the Across The Lake Swim Society and run by the YMCA Okanagan. Some of these kids are even invited to try doing the swim each year. As the event increases in popularity, the prospect of more swimming lessons becomes possible.

The swag!

ATLS swimmers tend to feel well taken care of beyond the swim itself. The event swag includes a custom-designed, award winning beach towel, a souvenir silicone cap, a swim gear bag, coupons and food samples. After completing the swim, there are many fantastic prizes, and a wide variety of finish line snacks provided by generous local sponsors such as Save-On Foods, Sun Rype and Starbucks.

Sponsors

The swim would not be possible if it was not for the generous support of our sponsors. We are extremely grateful for their help in making the swim possible year after year. Interior Savings Credit Union has been the title sponsor of the swim six years running. Both Air Canada and Blue Seventy have donated draw prizes - airline tickets and wetsuits respectively - for both participants and volunteers.

Growth

The marketing of the ATLS has been significantly enhanced with an attractive website with an in-house online registration system, and an intensive social media program. More sponsors have been interested in supporting the event and more local swimmers have been included in the expanding group of organizers of the event. The swim has increased in participation from just 400 swimmers in 2009 to over 1000 swimmers today and always sells out well in advance of the swim date.

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