

Man swims length of Lake Charlevoix

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G. Randall Goss/COURIER Marathon swimmer George Bradbury III, of Tucson and Charlevoix raises his fists as he completes a swim from Charlevoix's Depot Beach to Peninsula Beach in Boyne City, Wednesday, July 25. Bradbury completed the 17 mile swim in 7 hours, 18 minutes, 50 seconds.

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CHARLEVOIX — An Arizona man with local ties to Charlevoix has swum the entire length of Lake Charlevoix.

George Bradbury, 56, of Tuscon, began his swim from Depot Beach at approximately at 7:30 a.m. on Wednesday, July 25, and reached Peninsula Beach in Boyne City at approximately 2:44 p.m. The distance measures a little more than 13.8 miles and took 7 hours, 18 minutes and 50 seconds to complete, he said.

To put the swim in perspective, The English Channel, deemed the most prestigious open water swim, measures about 21 miles, he said.

The shore to shore swim has been in the planning stages for many years, and the decision to take on the challenge came not long after Bradbury completed the famed Strait of Gibraltar swim from Spain to Africa in 2011.

Bradbury was the first person from Arizona to complete the 10-mile swim across the Strait of Gibraltar. Bradbury is a 5 time Ironman triathlon finisher. The Ironman consists of a 2.4 mile swim followed by a 112-mile bike ride and finishing off with a marathon. He has competed in Switzerland, New Zealand, and the United States, he said.

Bradbury has spent many summers and has a lifetime of memories on Lake Charlevoix. with his family taking in the beauty of Lake Charlevoix. His family, originally from St. Louis, has owned a cottage on Mercer Avenue since 1902, and he retreats there often from his hectic life as chief of staff at Carondelet St. Joseph's Hospital in Tucson, Arizona, he said.

On Wednesday morning Bradbury was expected to begin his swim at Depot Beach with a water entry by boat. However, one of the crew had forgotten an old fashioned, suitcase-like picnic basket Bradbury stayed behind to pick that was carrying peaches for the swimmer and the all-important chips and cookies necessary to sustain life for the crew's day on the boat.

Bradbury joked about carrying the picnic basket and being Yogi Bear with an imitation of the animated character, "I've got my pic-a-nic basket, Boo Boo."

His crew and observers lowered a green kayak into the water that was meant to directly precede him during the day's swim. The kayak would trail behind the lead motor boat on the water.

Bradbury wasn't wearing a wetsuit because the water was unusually warm and he was going for a "ratified swim." He wouldn't be able to wear a watch to clock himself and a number of other restrictions to make this a ratified swim.

When asked whether he had a routine or superstitious habit he had prior to every swim, he said, "I meditate. I find that it is helpful to just clear my head and focus. It keeps my mind from wandering from thinking too much about how much distance that I've already traveled or how much further that I have to go."

Just before the swim started he handed off the picnic basket and his clothes before he moved back on the beach to stretch. He navigated over the rough stones at Depot Beach before he struck out for Boyne City's Peninsula Beach.

About halfway into his swim toward Boyne City Bradbury faced some difficulty from the wind.

"The wind was pretty gusty," he said. "That was throwing me around a fair amount and as we approached Young State Park it calmed down a little bit so that made the finish little nicer. Some roller waves and some chop, but we started off very smooth and that made it real nice."

He also attributes the wind to his finish that came in below his eight-hour expectation.

"It was faster than I thought it would be," Bradbury said. "We had some following seas and the wind was behind us for the second half and that certainly helped us out. I was grateful for that even though it kind of throws me around because it kind of does speed your trip."

During his swim he had friends and family who came to Charlevoix to support him on his endeavor, Bradbury said.

"I want to thank my support team. They were great," Bradbury said. "My father, my sister, my husband, my friend and coach all were special support along the way."

Bradbury hopes his swim is an inspiration for others to take on new challenges, he said.

“It is easy for life, with its daily grind, to make less out of us,” Bradbury said. “I want to make a statement that affirms the exciting things that life can bring. I hope to inspire others to aim high whatever their dreams may be. Hopefully inspire people to do something that makes their life more interesting.”

Bradbury will now submit the documentation to get his swim ratified. His coach has been an independent observer for a few English Channel crossings as well as a few Gibraltar crossing swims, which Bradbury hopes is sufficient for the ratification.

“He is pretty experienced in this and we used him as the observer we will try and get it ratified,” he said.

Twill Johnson contributed to this report.

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