

Plan and narration for first circumnavigation swim of St. John, USVI following Marathon Swimmers Federation guidelines

Swimmer: Jeff Miller

Age: 55

Nationality: US

Address: 10906 Eden, St. John VI 00830

Standard swim equipment will be used (as defined on Marathon Swimmers Federation website) without deviation.

Major marathon swims completed: May, 1987. First person to swim Bogue channel ~6 miles from Cayman Brac to Little Cayman. (details in

<https://www.caymancompass.com/2011/06/06/palfrey-breaks-brac-little-record/>)

Press coverage for this event: St. John Tradewinds on-line paper

<http://www.stjohntradewindsnews.com/jeff-miller-plans-solo-non-stop-swim-around-st-john/>

http://www.stjohntradewindsnews.com/miller-sets-record-swimming-around-st-john/?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter

Swim Route:

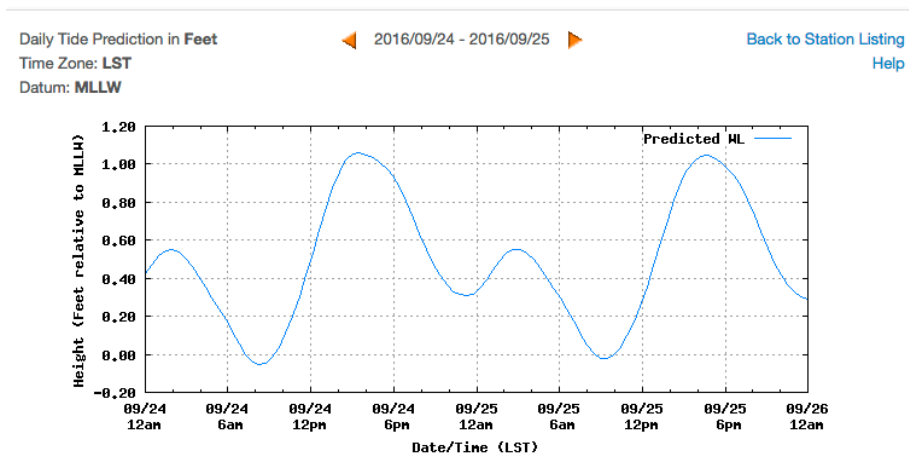
Circumnavigation start and finish at the Cruz Bay old seaplane ramp.

Progress across Cruz Bay entrance, to south shore, heading east. Straight line from Bovecap Point to Ram Head. Straight line from Ram Head to east end; around east end, heading northwest down through the narrows. Pass between Mary's Point and Whistling Cay, head west across Johnson's Reef, to Turtle Point, heading to and then around Lind Point, returning to the seaplane ramp.

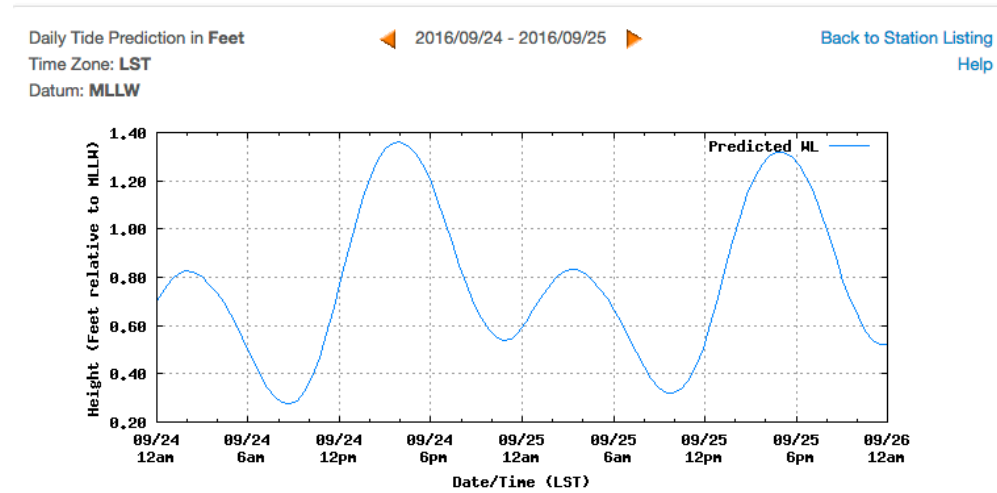
Safety Plan:

Begin at 0300. This is the best chance to beat the typical trade winds that develop once the sun is up. Training swims have shown best chance of neutral currents is to start in Cruz Bay near high tide and be near the east end with low tide. This model works with a near 3:00 am departure (see tide information, two figures below).

Lovango Cay, St. Johns Island, VI StationId: 9751467



Leinster Point, Leinster Bay, St. Johns Island, VI StationId: 9751309



The US Coast Guard, the National Park Service, and St. John Rescue were all contact in advance, informed of my preparations, and departure date.

Personnel and support:

Two people in a double kayak tend to the swimmer. A second double kayak is towed behind a powerboat. The powerboat tends to the kayaks and the kayak tends to the swimmer. There is a captain in the powerboat, and 4-person crew begins in Cruz Bay. When approaching Coral Bay, a second power boat is used to bring three other people out to the original power boat, and remove any people from the original Cruz Bay crew that are needing to get off (personal reasons, seasickness, boredom etc...). This second power boat returns to Coral Bay, swim continues with rotating crew in the double kayaks. Upon getting to Fungi Passage (between Mary's Point and Whistling Cay), there is an opportunity for crew to leave the powerboat (for whatever reasons) as long as 4 people plus the original captain remain to continue. Due to the potential late hour (it could be approaching dark again between Fungi passage and the finish), and that this can be a heavily traffic boat area for commercial and recreational boats, another kayak team will join at Fungi passage. This will add an additional pair of "fresh" people, new "eyes", not fatigued. Additionally, the people planned to do this are EMTs. The thought is that if a problem were to occur, it would likely occur at the end so it would be good to have EMTs available. If a boat were to be on a collision course with the swimmer, kayaks would be on both sides.... And the power boat would attempt to intercept.

Kayak tending to the swimmer has a two people: navigator in the back, feeder and data collector in the front. The navigator is following a GPS course on a Garmin GPS. The feeder has small cooler with pre-measured Perpetuem drink canisters and water. Feed bottle is tied to the kayak. The feeder has the clipboard with paper for recording observations, and a whistle to alert the swimmer to a feed or hazard. BOTH people in the kayak (as all on the crew) are aware of the MSF rules. They are observing for compliance with those rules so that the swimmer never makes contact with people, boat, object floating etc... and is completely unassisted. If they observe any violation, they are to report it to the primary observer (Adam Thill). A dry bag on

the kayak contains a GPS unit (Garmin Etrex 10) recording the course, a waterproof VHF radio, and sound making air horn. The powerboat stays back and away from the kayak tending the swimmer. The swimmer is not in a position to draft off any vessel.

When the kayak crews need to change, the new crew loads into the second double kayak, they move over to the tending kayak, exchange the dry bag, feed bottle/tether, clipboard and navigation GPS.

Feeding plan: Hammer nutrition product Perpetuem was used in half hour intervals. Power was premeasured into small containers and put in small coolers in each kayak. Those coolers also contained Gu gels, and shot blocks. A small drinking cooler with water was also on each kayak. A 32 ounce Nalgene bottle with clip top was tied to the kayak by a ten foot, 1/8" line. The feeder would mix a container of powder with a full bottle of water. Every 30 minutes they would blow a whistle to get the swimmers attention. He'd tread water, not touching the boat. They'd throw the bottle to him, and he'd drink, typically half the bottle every 30 minutes. Additional food for the swimmer in the powerboat included fruit, peanut butter and jelly sandwich, Coke. The crew had two coolers and food of their own.

Emergency supplies on the powerboat include first aid kit, oxygen, AED, and backboard. The route is being tracked by Track.RS (however this did not work). The crew on the powerboat kept in touch with friends on-shore making progress reports.

Weather conditions needed to be winds <10mph. The narrative forecast for Saturday and Sunday (9/24-9/25) were for winds 10-15. Tabular data showed winds forecast to be <10. Upon consultation with a meteorologist, we were told winds Saturday would be 5-10. It was decided to go that day, September 24.

While preparing the boat on Friday (9/23) the primary boat captained by Hank Slodden developed a fatal engine problem. We scrambled to secure another boat. We used Brent Squires 20' Twin V. He approved its use, with Adam Thill as Captain, and Hank as a second. Preparations continued.

CREW:

Hank Slodden – Second captain

Adam Thill - Captain and primary observer, feeder, in kayak observer, second shift

Adam Glahn – navigator (begin Cruz Bay, first) in kayak observer

Jude Woodcock – feeder (begin Cruz Bay, first shift), in kayak observer

Eric Bauman – navigator (begin Cruz Bay, second shift) in kayak observer

Joe Kessler – second powerboat Captain delivering people in Coral Bay to Twin V.

Matt Crafts – feeder (begin Coral Bay, third shift), in kayak observer

Tory Lane – navigator (begin Coral Bay, third shift), in kayak observer

Stephanie Guyer-Stevens feeder (begin Coral Bay, later shift), in kayak observer

Rick Gupman – EMT, joined in his own double kayak at Fungi Passage

Anne Finney – paddler with Rick in their own double kayak at Fungi Passage

Narrative:

When the date was set for Saturday (9/24), a full crew meeting was scheduled for Thursday night (9/22). All crew listed above was in attendance. Although I had previously talked to everyone about the swim plan, this was a chance to lay it out to everyone together. We also brought many items, to show them the small cooler, feed bottles, powder containers, etc. I read aloud the rules from the Marathon Swimmers Federation and discussed how I would comply with these. I discussed the role that each would play as observe when they were in the kayak as the primary observer would be some distant away in the powerboat. I asked if there were any questions about this and there were none. I asked if everyone felt they could report a violation, regardless of their friendship with me, but knowing it is vital to the spirit of marathon swimming to keep within the conduct of fair play. All assured me they could. (Adam Thill, the primary observer, has competed in running, biking, swimming, triathlon, and StandUpPaddle races for many years. He has been the Race Director and organized events as part of the St. John Landsharks group, and with his wife, is the race director for the annual Carnival Bike Race in St. John for over 10 years.)

Saturday (9/24)

Boat preparation and loading 2:00 to 3:00 am

Sunscreen, A&D ointment, light sticks on kayak and me. Power boat launched from Visitor Center dock and kayak in at seaplane ramp.

3:11 am – began swim by walking into water down seaplane ramp. (Pic 01.)

Kayak support: Adam Glahn – navigator,
Jude Woodcock – feed/obs

Powerboat: Adam Thill – Captain, primary observer
Hank Slodden – second captain
Eric Bauman – second team kayak support

The water was warm, about 85F; the air was still, with only a slight breeze near shore. This was the most relaxed I'd been in the 5 night swims that I'd done. The bioluminescence was impressive, as usual. As I progressed, I noticed more of the little amphipods or larval shrimp that would stick to me and I'd feel little bites. It starts as an annoyance, but persists. I'd stop, feel that part of my skin and eventually find a small (smaller than pin head) "thing" that I'd pick off and the annoyance went away.

The first three 30 min feed stops were on good pace for 30 min/mile. This suggested neutral current as previous swims in that area against the current had taken 40-50 min.; with the current was 22-25min. I rounded southshore headlands and headed to Ram Head still in the dark. Water conditions were good; light winds, 5-10, slight chop, water warm.

Approximately 2 hours into the swim, still in the dark, I swam very close to a submerged but large floating polypropylene fishing net. I didn't run into to it, but it was about 1-2' to my right side. It scared the crap out of me and flooded me with adrenalin. I shouted it out to the kayak crew, then spent the next 15 minutes trying to deal with the fatigue caused by the adrenalin loss. I was over a mile from shore, and tired of swimming in the dark. Dawn was approaching, the sky was getting lighter,

but it was still dark in the water. I was told the Track.rs map wasn't working. Bummer. I shouted out some instructions on how to get into my phone, and let it go. Sunrise over Ram Head was nice but still it took another 30 min. for the light to penetrate the water. When it finally did get light, the visibility was disappointing. That or my goggles were foggy. I didn't dwell on it. I could see the pattern changes in the bottom, so I could tell when I passed from the soft bottom community off White Cliffs, to the hard bottom off Lameshur Bay. This was where we had the shark encounter on the 15 miler a month ago and I was a little apprehensive of that. But it passed without any critter encounter. (Pic 02-04.)

The second kayak crew came in seamlessly. Jude's plan for the two kayaks was working great. Eric B (navigation) and Adam T (feeding): same swim plan. They follow the GPS track; I swim adjacent to the kayak. Passing Ram Head was a nice milestone; 1/3 done. Conditions were still good, water temperature 85F, wind <10, only slight chop to the water.

The next kayak team went in after LeDuc, seamlessly again. Tory Lane navigating, Matt Crafts feeding. We kept going. I was getting tired now. Tired of the drink. Tired of the choppy waves hitting me. I was working hard to keep a good attitude, and kept reminding myself I was making great time. According to the distance I was being told, I was keeping near 30 min per mile. I thought my stroke was slow and steady. But I could feel the doubt and crankiness. The next test was coming up and that would be the current around the east end. (Pic 05a.)

Swimming around the east end seemed endless. In an attempt at humor, I told the kayakers I should have lived on a smaller island. Privateer point "looks" like the end but there are two more "points" after it to go around before the turn down the channel to the narrows. I was seeing the bottom and the octocorals were standing straight up; good news for me, very little if any current. At the east end point (Pic 05b.), about 100 horse-eyed jack schooled around me. After finally rounding the east end, looking to the east, Norman Island and The Indians, and saw a small squall developing. I was very thankful for all the work and support to get up early, to start and leave when I did, so I could be to this windward position before wind/weather picked up. I don't think it ever rained on us as the squall passed to our southwest. But I had rounded the "corner", each stroke was taking me closer instead of further. (Pic 6.)

Going down the channel, I was disappointed to not be seeing a lot of the bottom but the course took me in slightly deeper water, and the visibility was not stellar. Haulover, Mennebeck, Brown Bays came and went (Pic 7). I would swim mostly freestyle, occasional backstroke, and breaststroke for variation. I'd continued feeding every 30 min., taking some gu gel packs, a few grapes for change.

Status check: my nose was a mess. I worked so hard not to breathe out through it, but it was still raw. My mouth and tongue were so/so. Some sores, but feeding wasn't too bad. My hip and lower back were not painful, amazing. My head ached. I tried changing the goggle position, I took the cap off, but the sun was too harsh so I put it back on. I eventually asked that two Advil be put in the feed bottle and I drank those down. My stomach was good; I had consistent energy. The water temperature was perfect; almost like I didn't feel the water temperature: not hot or cold. The "only" developing challenge was my right arm/shoulder/peck/cuff. It was getting sore.

Brown Bay is about 16 miles. So 2 of my 3 eight mile swims were done. I was 2/3rds done. All good. I was tired of not seeing anything but different shades of sand and seagrass. No turtles, barracuda, bar jacks, and no snorkel jacks. Passing Waterlemon Cay and into Leinster Bay it was “interesting” to see the boat exclusion buoys and moorings. It seemed to be the first “man made” things I’d seen in a while. Swimming along Mary’s Point (Pic 8.), I deviated from the track a bit to go nearer to shore to be able to see some of the marine life there. Nice to have some coral and fish to keep me company.

The support crew was fantastic (Pic 9). They were keeping me fed with drink every half hour, they switched in and out without hitch. It all was a bit of a blur to me, what they were doing, but they were always there for me, not too close and not too far away. The navigation was easy in that we could see from point to point, and with the gentle sea and wind conditions their passage wasn’t difficult. Rick Gupman (an EMT) and his wife Anne Finney joined the armada, as planned just prior to Fungi Passage. Tory and Matt left the powerboat, needing to get to their jobs.

Passing the old customs house on Whistling Cay (Pic 10) was about 19 miles, and time was just at 10 hours. The conditions were good: water warm, wind light, but making slight chop to the side now but all good. The stretch to Johnson’s Reef was uneventful, with a few stroke changes to stretch my back and rest my sore right arm. Crossing Johnson’s Reef allowed me to see some reef and fish again. All was going well. Coming up on narrow section off Turtle Point and Caneel (Pic 11-12) I was very pleased to again see octocorals standing erect, indicating no significant current in either direction.

I was surprised at the amount of tropical fish in the boulders off Lind Point, in that cloudy, yucky, hot water, but it was fun to see. Getting deeper into Cruz Bay was fun. I had started from here, in the dark, over 12 hours ago! I could see a group of people at the ramp. Sighting the ramp (Pic 13), kept going till I saw the concrete of the ramp below me, and swam till I was about a foot deep. Then I tried to stand up, slipped a few times on the algae covered ramp, but eventually got footing.

About 25 people were cheering me on. It was a challenge getting my land legs back on the slippery boat ramp, a slip or two at first then I was up walking to dry land and done. (Pic 14.) 12 hours, 19 minutes, 35 seconds.

2016	Moonrise/Moonset			Meridian Passing		
Sep	Moonrise	Moonset	Moonrise	Time	Distance (km)	Illumination
10	-	00:17 (251°)	13:36 (109°)	19:23 (92.7°)	385,093	85.3%
11	-	01:08 (251°)	14:25 (109°)	20:11 (53.2°)	389,082	74.1%
12	-	01:58 (251°)	15:14 (108°)	21:03 (54.8°)	383,135	83.0%
13	-	02:53 (253°)	16:03 (105°)	21:56 (57.4°)	377,119	90.6%
14	-	03:50 (256°)	16:52 (102°)	22:49 (60.9°)	371,552	96.2%
15	-	04:49 (260°)	17:40 (98°)	23:42 (65.2°)	366,940	99.4%
16	○	05:48 (265°)	18:27 (93°)	Moon does not pass the meridian on this day.		
17	-	06:49 (270°)	19:14 (88°)	00:36 (69.9°)	363,695	99.8%
18	-	07:50 (275°)	20:03 (83°)	01:30 (74.9°)	362,074	97.0%
19	-	08:51 (280°)	20:53 (78°)	02:25 (79.6°)	362,131	91.3%
20	-	09:53 (284°)	21:44 (75°)	03:21 (83.7°)	363,727	83.1%
21	-	10:55 (287°)	22:38 (72°)	04:18 (87.0°)	366,572	73.0%
22	-	11:55 (289°)	23:33 (71°)	05:16 (89.2°)	370,295	61.7%
23	●	12:52 (289°)	-	06:12 (89.9°)	374,520	50.0%
24	●	00:29 (71°)	13:47 (289°)	07:08 (89.8°)	378,925	38.6%

Moonrise data for Cruz Bay, St. John, USVI

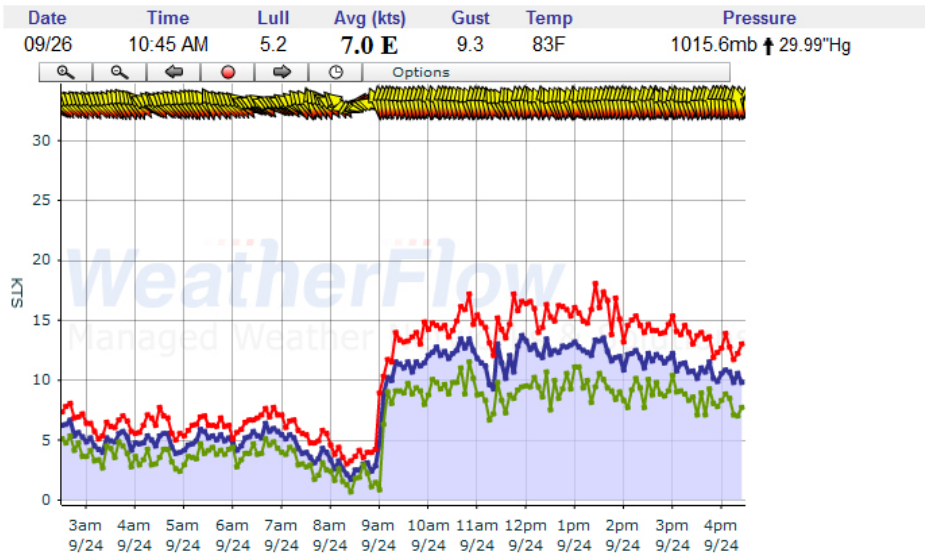
WeatherFlow

Live Weather Data Center

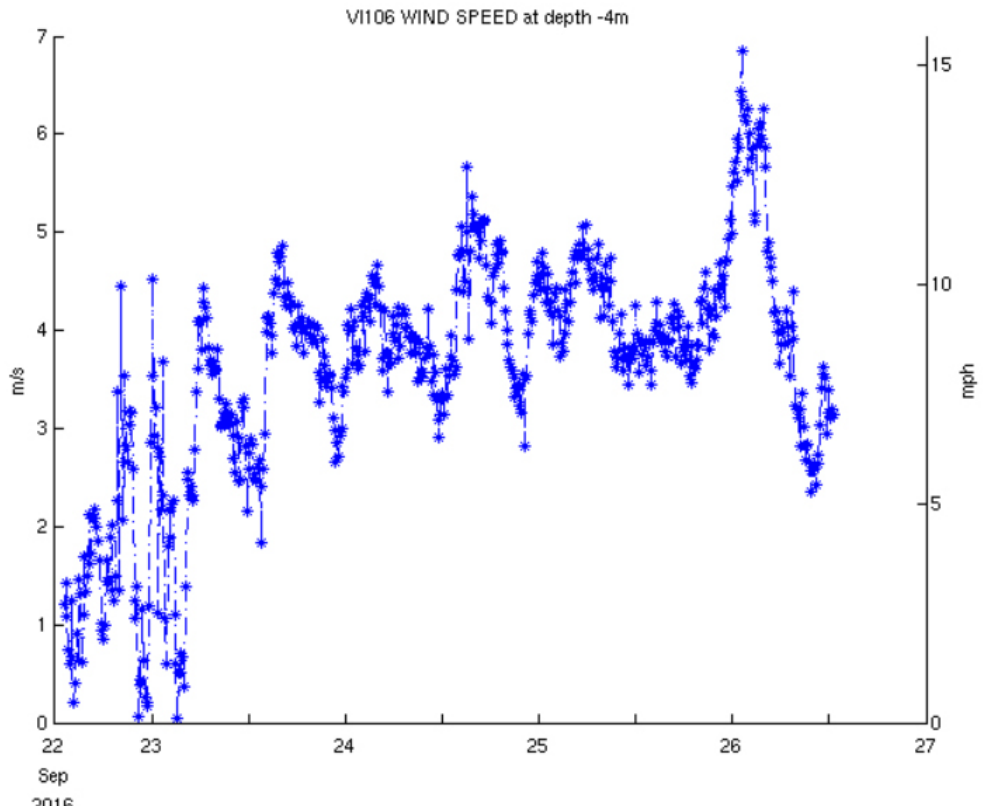
Region: USVI - St. Thomas/St. John

Product: Observations

Station: X429 Two Brothers, USVI (18.34291000, -64.81730000)
 Source: WeatherFlow
 Observations: [Daily Graph](#) | [USCG SAR Data](#) Forecast Data: [7 Day Meteogram](#)



Wind data at Two Brothers station, located between St. John and St. Thomas USVI.



Wind speed at Caricoos Buoy, 5 miles offshore Reef Bay (south side), St. John.