

I completed my 30<sup>th</sup> swim in 2017 and will not be swimming any more due to health issues. Including my 4 brothers and 3 nephews we have 104 swims as a family so we have seen a lot of conditions.

I hope this helps. Sorry that it is a bit long but it is a real memory dump of important information from past swims.

Even with the 10 second intervals I expect that it will be crowded as you leave the beach at Sandy Point until you get to the bridge. Once the chaos ends you will be swimming by yourself until the end. There may be a number of swimmers around you but you will not see them.

Before describing suggested swim paths it is good to understand that the bridge is not straight. It makes a reasonably sharp turn to the left as you will experience it.



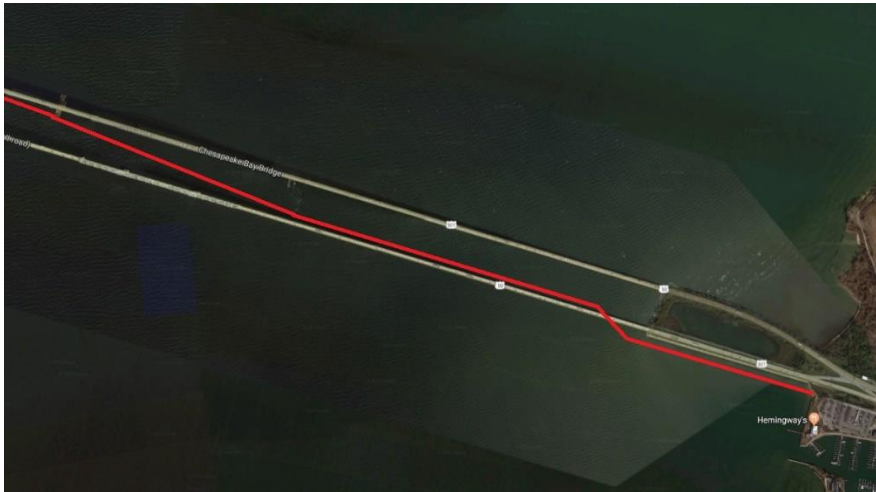
This is the way we would recommend you swim the course: When you leave the beach you head past the jetty and swim to the bridge following the course markers.



When you get between the spans stay by the north bridge (to the left). Sight your position at least every 10 strokes (look up at the bridge spans not to the end of the swim).



Drift to the south (right) after the eastern ship channel but remember to stay between the spans.



Follow the buoys to know when to come out from between the spans and head for shore. At the end stay near the rock pile and do not go wide right. No need to make the swim longer than it needs to be.

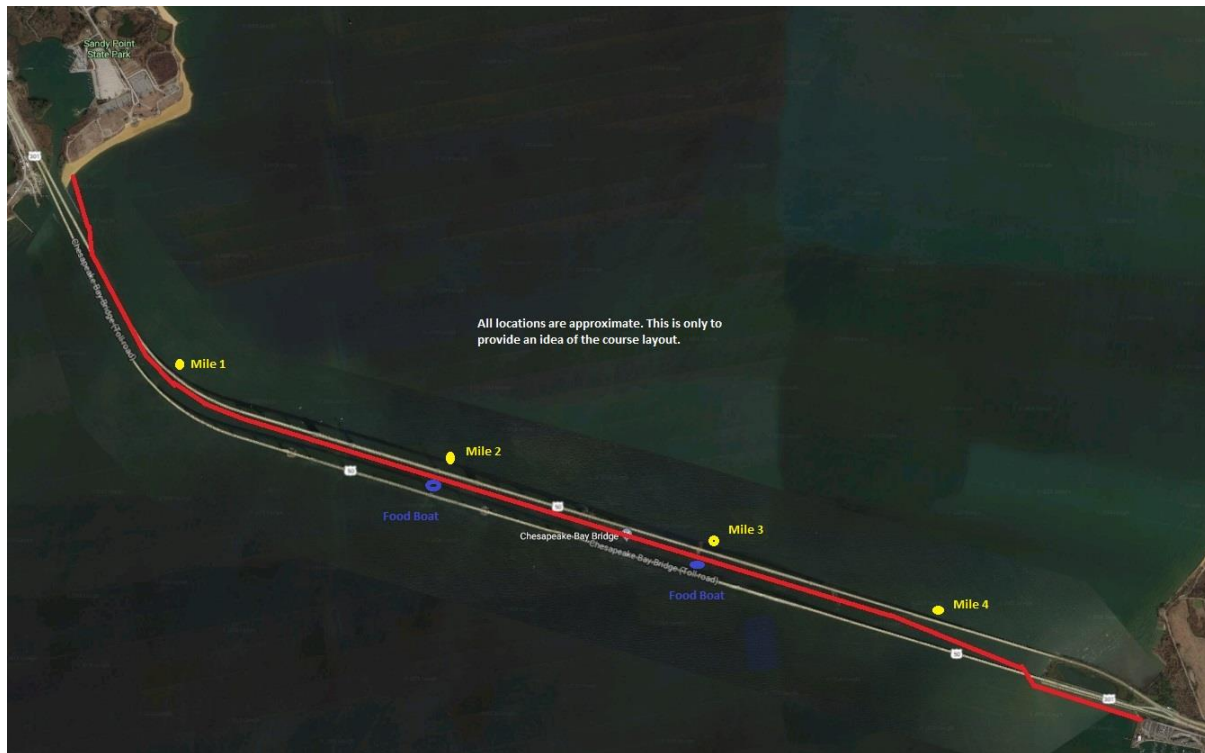


Depending on water levels you may be able to dolphin in to shore. That stretches your legs out, loosens your shoulders and helps to stabilize your inner ear from 2 hours of head turning. I still fall down when I try to stand up so I just have to take it slow. When you make the cut out from between the bridge spans to the jetty it is really rough. Once you get beside the jetty it calms down.

In the past the entrance to and exit from the bridge there are two big "beach balls". The only buoys in the race are orange markers at the 1, 2 and 3 mile mark. This may be different this year.

To avoid the piers/pilings you have to sight to the side every couple of strokes. The pilings have barnacles on them and can give you some nasty scrapes if you get too close. Depending on the wind & tide conditions it can cause a strange eddy around the series of pilings where the bridge curves. The eddy can carry you north and into the piling if you stay in close. Give all of the pilings a wide berth to avoid contact and that rough water.

There will be boats at the 2 and 3 mile marks with water and crackers. They are in the center or center right between the overhead bridge spans. You may have to stop swimming and pop up a bit to see them. The recommended path (and approximate location of the water boats) is marked in the photos here along with a photo of the way the bridge curves – hence why you stay to the north or left side:



Most importantly don't look up to see the end while you are swimming. If you look to see how far you have to go the end never seems to move and you will psych yourself out. Just keep your head down, count strokes or count pilings and keep going. The bridge spans will break up the swells so no need to adjust your stroke.

Cramping can be a problem. There is water at the start, water and crackers on the boats at 2 & 3 miles but no Gatorade or equivalent until you reach the finish. I always take a couple of bananas and two bottles of Gatorade with me to consume at Sandy Point prior to the swim.

For a number of years there has been a paint barge somewhere along the course. It is positioned under one of the spans but the anchor line extends far into the swim area. Use caution to avoid being scraped by any of the mooring lines.

In addition to warmth, a wetsuit provides buoyancy and makes the swim easier. It streamlines you and keeps your hips up. The year that we did not wear one all of us (4 brothers) were 15 minutes slower than other years. My brothers and I wore a long triathlon suit (no sleeves) and dealt with the heat if needed. In 2016 (a warm year with a late day start) of the 642 Finishers 74% wore wetsuits. It really depends on what you are comfortable in and whether the water warms up. It is hard to know what the exact conditions will be that day until the day arrives. Body glide and sunscreen are absolutely necessary. The wetsuit will "bite" your neck and your arms, upper back and neck will get burned. The hip buoyancy is most applicable to men. Women's body structure is a bit different. The suit will still help to make the swim easier.

Kayakers will be present throughout the swim. If you need assistance raise your hand or call out to be sure they see you. They will get you to a rescue vessel if needed. Once you leave the course to go to a rescue vessel you may not re-enter to continue the swim.

Once you finish the swim and exit the water you will get help to remove your timing chip and the tag under your cap. There will be a medical tent if you just want to sit a bit or if you need any assistance to recover from nausea. To get to the rest of the finish area you will need to walk along a fence at the

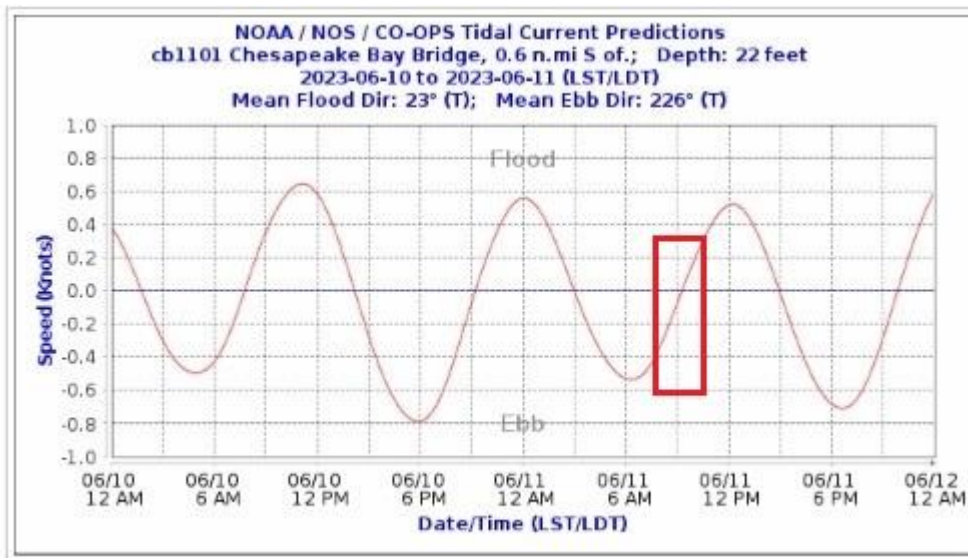


side of the driveway. In that area they will have Gatorade or an equivalent, water, oranges, bananas and other goodies for all of the swimmers.

Having started this swim in 1986 I guarantee that water conditions have the biggest impact on the race. There have been cold years when hypothermia was a real concern, warm years when heat exhaustion took its toll on swimmers wearing a wetsuit, calm years with winds at our back allowing us to almost body surf the whole way across and those years where the waves beat you up catching your arm on every stroke and causing sea sickness from getting battered around. Hopefully this year will be one of the calm swims with comfortable water temps. Physical conditioning is critical but so is watching the weather and preparing mentally for the conditions anticipated for that day.

The tidal and current range on the eastern shore is generally higher than that on the corresponding western shore. The swim starts on the end of the flood tide (so the current will be running toward the north) and progresses to the ebb but by that time most swimmers should be finished. No swimmer has ever been swept off course to the north. Many have been pulled out to the south. Remember that the surface current is determined by the wind direction. The tidal current predominates in the western and eastern ship channels (the two big bridge supports).

Bay bridge currents:



Temps, winds:

The Thomas Point station no longer shows water temp. The Annapolis station is the closest monitoring station where that can be seen: [NDBC - Station 44063 Recent Data](#)

The Chesapeake Channel shows the winds and tidal flow that you will experience through the swim:

[https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/ofc/ofc\\_station.html?stname=Chesapeake%20Channel%20LBB%2092&ofs=cb&stnid=cb1101&subdomain=0](https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/ofc/ofc_station.html?stname=Chesapeake%20Channel%20LBB%2092&ofs=cb&stnid=cb1101&subdomain=0)

The water temperature at this site looks suspiciously high so don't let it influence your thoughts on wetsuit or not.

It will do you good to get into the pool the day after the swim to loosen up. Those who have done it have been thankful.

If you have other questions just ask. I will be near the registration table on swim day.

Happy swimming! Good luck! Tom