

Catherine Breed Monterey Bay Solo 2020

Swimmer: Catherine Breed

Swim: TRANS – MONTEREY BAY SOLO MARATHON

Date: 9/21/20 and 9/22/20

Observer 1: KIM RUTHERFORD

Boat & Captain(s): Brian Thom, Greg Gubser, Nomad Sailing Charters

Crew: Amy Gubser (chief) Robin Breed, Ricardo Vabina (paddler)

Swimwear/Equipment: Standard equipment included: standard porous swim suit which did not extend below the crotch or over the shoulders, 1 standard silicon swim cap, standard race-style swim goggles, ear plugs, mix of [Safe Sea](#)/Desotin (zinc)/petroleum for chaffing, sun-screen, and jellyfish toxic reduction. Non-standard equipment allowed by the swim association and determined to provide no advantage to speed, buoyancy, or warmth of the swimmer: 1) a small [Skarkbanz](#) on her left ankle; 2) a smartwatch in a “disabled/off” mode as to not transmit any real-time data to the swimmer (other than time of day); 3) for a few hours during the night portion of the swim, a [shark-shield](#) device was attached to the support paddler (not swimmer).

Planned Course: Santa Cruz Seabright Beach to Monterey San Carlos Beach (harbor to harbor)
25 STATUTE MILES, 40.23 KILOMETERS

Actual Course: SAME AS PLANNED

Final Swim Duration: 12 HOURS, 42 MINUTES, 14 SECONDS

Start Time: 21:01:06

Finish Time: 09:44:00

Start: SEABRIGHT BEACH, SANTA CRUZ 36°57'41.57"N, 122° 0'12.68"W

Finish: SAN CARLOS BEACH, MONTEREY N36 36.574' W121 53.694'

Feeding Plan: On hour for first two hours, then every 30. Infinite Sports Mix (Carb, Protein, Electrolyte mix).

Outcome/Notes:

Swim was a success.

12:42:14 currently qualifies as a new course record (Seabright/Harbor to San Carlos, N>S)

Water temp: 54 TO 61 F.

Catherine sustained approximately 50+ jellyfish stings, mostly by Sea Nettles.

Press:

Santa Cruz Sentinel: <https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2020/09/23/pleasantons-catherine-breed-27-sets-record-in-swim-across-monterey-bay-open-water-swimming/>

KION (Note: news misreported her swim time): <https://kion546.com/news/santa-cruz-county/2020/09/22/track-live-swimmer-on-her-way-from-santa-cruz-to-monterey-to-raise-money-for-diversity-in-aquatics/>



TEMPS IN DEGREES FARENHEIT. DISTANCE IN STATUE MILES. WIND IN KNOTS. WAVES IN FEET.

Time	H2O	Air	Wave	Wind	Stroke	Observations
21:01:46	59	60		1.3k	64	9/21/20 START It is a foggy night. Not great visibility. Rolling swell and the boat is rocking. Paddler is instructed to stay a-beam, distant, and behind swimmer. Not much moon/dark night.
21:51		60			67	Swimmers says she hears dolphins
22:00						FEED: Infinite 400 ML
23:00	61	58	Rollers	1.1k	67	FEED: Infinite 400 ML Feeding Rope too short – adding rope First Jelly stings
00:00	58	58	Rollers	0	66	9/22/20
00:30	58	58	Rollers	1	66	FEED: 150-200 ML Ibuprofen
01:00	58	57	Rollers	0	66	FEED: 400 ML Cat was getting “down” but is not in a better mood. Swell is making it hard for paddler to balance.
01:30	58	57	Rollers	0	66	FEED: 300 ML
02:00	58	57	Rollers	0	66	FEED: 300 ML
02:30	58	57	Rollers	1.2	66	FEED: 350 ML Very Foggy/Dark Night Paddler is feeling sick and unsteady. Considering pulling paddler. Falling behind swimmer and boat.
03:00	57			1.2	64	Fog is now really low. Crew can smell exhaust from boat trapped in Fog. FEED: 300 ML
03:30	54	54		0	60	Swimmers reports lots of Bioluminescence. Visibility down to 50' Swimmer reporting more jelly fish stings FEED: 300 ML
04:00	57	57	Rollers	0	62	FEED: 200 ML
04:30	57	57	Rollers	0	62	FEED: 200 ML Swimmer switching side of boat. Warm feed of water to paddler.
05:00	58	55	Roller	1.5	64	FEED: 300 ML
05:30	58	55	Roller	2	64	Pull Paddler – mild hypothermia, difficulty balancing and continue to fall behind swimmer
06:00	58	55	Rollers	2	65	FEED: 200 ML
06:30	58	55	2	65		FEED: 200 ML Harbor Seals Ibuprofen
07:00	58	55	Roller	2k		Whales Breaching
07:15					63	Double Dose Feed
08:00	56	56		1.5	62	300 ML

Catherine Breed Monterey Bay Solo 2020

08:30	59	56		1	59	Lots of Jellies 2 feet below surface. Still very foggy with bits of blue sky
09:00	59	56	Rollers	1	65	Tons jellies now. Lots of stings
09:13						Passing Red Buoy
09:00						Greg deploys on paddleboard to swim in with Swimmer
09:44:00						Swimmer clear of water END

Swimmer Narrative (taken from Catherine Breed's Personal Swim Blog)

It's 3am, I have been swimming for 7 hours. It is so dark that I cannot make out the sky from the ocean and the water temperature feels like it dropped but I don't want to tell my crew I am cold, I don't want them to worry. "Just get to 6am" I repeat over and over again. As a jellyfish hits me in the face I quietly repeat, "7 more feeds, get to first light".

On the night of September 21st I swam 25 miles from Santa Cruz to San Carlos beach Monterey. The water temperature ranged from 54-58 degrees and a 3 to 4 foot swell rocked our boat Nomad side to side. My body covered with zinc and Safe sea, "white is not a flattering color on you", my mother tells me.

My crew was made up of boat Captain Brian Thom, chief crew Amy Gubser, co-Captain Greg Gubser, observer Kim Rutherford, Paddler Ricardo Urbina, and social media my mom Robin Breed. The best of the best included the 3rd and 4th persons to have ever crossed the bay, Amy and Kim. I trust them with my life and in the moment, I wanted to quit or hoped a shark would appear and call my swim I thought about them. I cannot disappoint these people; I have to be tough. Amy and Kim having both braved these waters and done the crossing themselves, their presence gave me strength, one stroke at a time.

I always get to hour 4 without talking, as quick as I can. This time was particularly tough, as I felt almost sick with nerves, adrenaline and fear. I know first-hand that these waters are sharky and I could sense that the depths were teeming with life. At 1am, a good distance was put between myself and Santa Cruz and I finally spoke to my crew and felt calm. The water was warm, the wind had quieted, the stars above started to peep out from the marine layer. "It's so warm!" I proclaimed.

I quickly realized I had spoken too soon. Not much later we began to make our way over the first canyon, the heavy upwelling slowing my pace down and no matter how hard I tried, it is impossible to beat the ocean. The water temperature, unknowingly to me, dropped to 54 and I felt my core getting cold. The fog rolled back in, obstructing the view of the stars and so thick that all I could see was the refraction of Ricardo's green light shining like a beacon up to the sky. I lost my senses—my tongue salty, my hands numb, my eyes useless, ear plugs blocking all sound. It was surreal in a horrible way.

[MBSA Note: Monterey Bay Canyons predictably generate large eddies, and there is upwelling along the edges and over the canyons, which in turn can create unpredictable currents. These currents have been known to slow, stop, or aid the speed of a swimmer. Temperatures almost always drop mid-canyon and temperatures in the low to mid 50s F are common.]

Every stroke my hand would shine, small silvery stars flowed past my goggles, illuminating nothing but the depths. I owe my swim to these tiny organisms that I personified as all the women that helped me get to where I was in that exact moment. They were all with me.

For two hours I was able to mentally manage myself in the dark, I noticed Ricardo falling back but I didn't think much of it, "he is probably just stretching" I thought. Keep swimming I told myself, "he will be ok".

Then I learned my pace had dropped and a cross current had kicked in. I was furious at myself. I kicked, pulled, gritted my teeth but remember, the ocean always wins. I was starting to feel defeated, would I even finish? Based on information relayed from the boat, my estimated finish time was very far off the record. It was in this moment, I let it go. You see, I broke a record on my first marathon swim, Lake Tahoe. From that point on, every time I enter the water there are people asking, "what is the record? Are you going for it?". I felt like the only way people would care or be proud of me was if I 'broke a record'. It even went one step farther, that I had to break not just the women's record but the OVERALL.

[MBSA Note: Monterey Bay Swimming Association does not differentiate between gender records. The association notes the current fastest swim for a given course/route, regardless of swimmer gender.]

That pressure is heavy to carry for 12 hours. So, I let go of it. I was proud of myself for attempting this, for pushing myself to my mental and physical limit in the midst of a global pandemic, civil unrest, political turmoil and wildfires affecting my state. I was proud of ME for just starting this.

I smiled and played with the stars in the water.

3am to 6:30am was the hardest part, the darkness devouring me from the inside, starting with my mind. I fought back; a small battle was waging in my head. But I could not complain, I could not tell my crew I was struggling. I chose to swim at 9pm, I chose to avoid the wind by starting at 9pm, I chose to swim in the dark. I cannot tell these absolutely bad ass women that I am tired. So, I push on, another sting to the face from an invisible creature gives me few minutes of distraction with the pain.

I notice things are worse with Ricardo, he has now fallen off his board several times, something I have never seen him do. It is at this point they tell me he is very sick. In my lack of coherence, I begged him to stay until first light.

I want to say this, the safety of the crew and swimmer is ALWAYS priority number one. The time and completing it are the goals but a swim can always be attempted again. When I asked Ricardo to stay in, I did not know he had been sick for hours. After I learned what happened I felt horrible, he did amazing getting me through the toughest parts and beyond that, he is the person who trained alongside me for this swim. We are teammates and I am so proud of him.

Around 6:45 the sky started to separate from the ocean and I could make out the faces of my crew. I saw my mom huddled there, she was incredible. My 6 beat kick was starting to take a toll on my hip flexors and they were completely cramped so I turned to using my glutes to

initiate the kick. I focused on rotation and finishing my stroke, “engage your core, hips up, keep every recovery long and relaxed”, I repeated. During the swim I was constantly checking in with my stroke, making sure I was swimming efficiently. It is also around this point I was told that my new ETA was 13:02. Are you effing kidding me? I am going to swim 25miles and miss a record by 2minutes? I just told myself it didn’t matter?! So, I do the thing I do best, get competitive and turn on another gear. I am almost to 50 jellyfish stings, not bad considering the thousands below me.

The fog starts to lift and I can make out shore in front of me, however when you are that far out it feels like the shore never gets any closer. I forced myself not to look but then Mother Nature intervened taking that option away from me and a dense marine layer rolled back in. In hindsight, I am just really sad we didn’t get a gorgeous sunrise. The sunrises over the bay are epic and for some reason I feel personally responsible that my crew didn’t get that glorious moment.

I could feel that we were approaching shore, the crew got an amazing show from whales and I was happy for them. I only swam through the poop, not as amazing. “2 miles left!” Kim and Amy tell me. Kick, pull, rotate, go faster.

I see the first buoy with sea lions resting on it, observing the weird animal painted in white swimming past them. Then the MPSC marker. Finally, Greg [*Gubser*] is suited up and lowering the surfboard into the water. “We must be close, as soon as he jumps in, I’ll give it all I have.” Greg lowered his board in and I almost jested that we should “race” —yea, I am not competitive at all. KELP! Oh my goodness I have never been so happy to be dodging kelp. Knowing the water off San Carlos I knew where we were even though I couldn’t see it. I didn’t want to maneuver through the kelp, I wanted to swim the shortest distance straight to the rocks and or beach that was waiting for me. My saltwater logged body was begging for dry land.

Within a few minutes there was sand under me. On the first attempt to stand I realized my hip flexors were not working at all. On the second try I make it up and plop down, forgetting the rule is to finish on DRY sand, ugh.

12 hours 42 minutes and 14 seconds. Just like that, the swim was over.

I have done several marathon swims and the media is meager at most, a local newspaper getting most of the story right and a few hundred from the swim community congratulating me. I like that it is small, that our little community full of big personalities does these crazy things and only we know. I was and still am overwhelmed by the outreach, the podcast requests, the support, the comments. I do these swims because they are there to be done. I hope to inspire someone along the way. I hope to bring awareness to the lack of diversity in our sport in the hopes that we will all reflect on what we can do better. I hope I can enjoy this small moment in the spotlight and be an ambassador for our sport and through this swim, one person who never thought about swimming, goes and buys a suit and goggles for the first time.

I don't know when it will hit me what I just did, I don't think it ever really will. Being so present in a moment often feels like sleeping or a "blink of the eye". I remember most of it, I remember the start and hour four being so happy. I remember just wanting to get to 5am and then 7am. I remember flashing the I LOVE YOU sign to my mom. Mostly though I remember the dark and I remember all the people who got me through it, not just the ones on the boat. Marathon swimming is not a solo sport, it is a full team effort. However, I think that the ocean has magic in it but the only way to experience it, to be let in on the secret, is to meet Her alone.





















