

THE ICE MAIDEN



Jaimie Monahan, 37, is an American winter swimmer and marathon swimmer from New York City, but she has swum everywhere from Antarctica to the Arctic Circle. Her recent swims include an ice mile in Russia in 0 degree Celsius water and a 42.8-mile solo swim across Lake Geneva.

Those are just two achievements that made 2016 a breathtaking year of swimming exploration by Jaimie. In recognition of her accomplishments she received the Barra Award for the Best Overall Year from the Global Marathon

Swimmers Federation – an award that also recognises her passion and support of other swimmers in the community.

“Jaimie is a truly international swimmer. She’s completed a staggering variety of swims, in terms of distance, geography, and water temperature. She inspires the global community of open water swimmers through her joy and passion for the sport,” explains Evan Morrison, co-founder of the Marathon Swimmers Federation.

Alice Gartland spoke to Jaimie to find out more about the world of ultra distance and extreme ice swimming...

Ice fly in
Antarctica!

I WAS
HOOKED BY
THE BEAUTY AND
CHALLENGE OF
OPEN WATER
SWIMMING

THE JOY OF OUTDOOR SWIMMING

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INTO OUTDOOR SWIMMING?

I was a pool swimmer my whole life but never really had an affinity for the ocean, maybe because I don't like being in the sun. About 10 years ago I entered a lottery for the Escape from Alcatraz Triathlon on a total whim and got in. My first open water swim was actually from Alcatraz Island to San Francisco during that triathlon. From

there I was hooked by the beauty and challenge of open water swimming and started participating in triathlons and then stand-alone open water swims in NYC.

WHAT DOES OUTDOOR SWIMMING MEAN TO YOU?

Outdoor swimming is my relaxation, a personal challenge, and sometimes both at once! my longer swims are almost like a moving meditation, as my friend Capri Djatiasmore often says. Open water swimming has taken me all around the world and given me so many wonderful friends around the globe. Outdoor swimming has enriched my life in almost every way.

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING DO YOU DO?

I practise with the McBurney YMCA Masters Swim team in an indoor pool during the week and then swim outdoors all year round with CIBBOWS (Coney Island Brighton Beach Open Water Swimmers) at the weekend. In addition to swim training I also lift weights and do a lot of vinyasa yoga and HIIT (high intensity interval training) classes.

WHAT KIT DO YOU USE?

Just a regular swimsuit, cap, goggles and silicone earplugs! I am also very big on sunscreen. For marathon swims I wear a layer of SPF 50 with a ton of zinc oxide diaper cream. It's a little extreme but I prefer looking like a ghost to getting sunburn. To remove the diaper cream, makeup remover wipes work best.

WINTER SWIMMING

WHAT MADE YOU TAKE UP COLD WATER SWIMMING?

I was planning a vacation to Finnish Lapland a couple of years ago to watch the Northern Lights. Around the same time I got an email about the Winter Swimming Championships in Rovaniemi and figured I'd add a stop to our itinerary to try it out. It ended up being one of the most amazing things I'd ever experienced and from there I was hooked by the exhilarating combination of cold water, healthy lifestyle and camaraderie.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE THE FIRST PERSON TO COMPLETE THE ICE SEVENS CHALLENGE (SEVEN ICE MILES ON SEVEN CONTINENTS, ONE AT ZERO DEGREES)?

I chose the "Ice Sevens Challenge" as a personal goal and test of my physiological, logistical and mental capabilities. It's also been a great excuse to explore the world's most beautiful and extreme landscapes through swimming. This year has been an amazing journey that has taken me from Iceland, to Siberia, Morocco's Atlas Mountains, above the Arctic Circle, back home to North America, then across the globe to New Zealand's stunning glacier lakes and finally to Ushuaia, Argentina's historic Beagle



← Channel at the “End of the World.” I hope this challenge inspires other swimmers to pursue their own goals safely and in a way that is personally meaningful to them.

HOW DO YOU PREPARE AND LOOK AFTER YOURSELF FOR ICE SWIMS?

It depends on the swim and the facilities available. It's important not to rewarm too quickly after a cold water swim so that the blood doesn't rush back from your extremities into your core and cause a shock to your system. In Morocco the water was relatively warm and I was able to get dressed quickly and shiver it out on the way home in a heated car. In Reykjavik we walked just a few metres into a lovely steam room where we used Icelandic wool blankets to let the warmth in gradually. I always prefer to tailor my recovery based on the local methods and resources. But the gold standard is always the Russian Banya recovery method.

MARATHON SWIMMING

HOW AND WHY DID YOU MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM SWIMMING A FEW MILES TO ULTRA-MARATHON SWIMMING?

I think it's important to make this transition and ramp up distance gradually. I started open water swimming with a 1.5 mile Alcatraz swim, then began a series of local swims in NYC from the 2-mile Governors Island swim up to the 10km distance. From there I doubled up to Swim Around Key West (12 miles/20km) and from there started training for the English Channel. After completing the Triple Crown I was focused on winter swimming until I got an email about the Lake Geneva Swimming Association solo swim. It piqued my interest and I signed up for a 69km/42-mile solo challenge six months later. It was one of the most amazing experiences of my life and the

WE USED ICELANDIC WOOL BLANKETS TO LET THE WARMTH IN GRADUALLY

next summer I returned to Geneva to swim the Lac the other way, soaking in its gorgeous waters and seeing all the same stunning scenery and historic landmarks along the way.

WHAT COMPONENTS DO YOU NEED FOR A SUCCESSFUL ULTRA-MARATHON SWIM?

In general, a strong team, a well thought-out plan, mental strength and good conditioning are most important. The team is the most important thing. It doesn't need to be a large number of people, but they need to be focused, experienced, and utterly dedicated to the swim. I would rather have a team of four people truly dedicated to a swim than 24 who are just along for the ride.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE YOUR SWIMMING CHALLENGES?

It's actually hard to say that I've chosen my swims when it usually feels like somehow they've chosen me. But for me it's paramount to make sure each challenge really resonates with me, in

0 DEGREE ICE MILE IN TYUMEN, RUSSIA

in 30 minutes 20 seconds
on 18 December 2016

“On the day of my mile swim the air was 30 degrees below zero. It was hard to even stand still outside for more than a few minutes in my boots and parka. I wondered how I was going to swim for a mile, but then decided to do what I always do, take it lap by lap, monitor myself closely, and re-evaluate every 100 metres. To me this is the only safe way to do any cold water swim. There are so many factors – hydration, sleep, training – that can affect your resistance to cold water and just because you've done a particular distance/time/temperature on a given day doesn't automatically mean it's safe to do the same thing on a different day. Every swim is different and it's always important to be vigilant about your own personal health at all times.

“During the swim itself, I started with a male swimmer. We started strong, and I felt great as usually my longer cold swims are in the open water rather than an ice pool. At least every 200 metres Arik Thormahlen [Jaimie's support crew] would test me or ask me a question to make sure I was still okay. In cold water, when swimmers get into trouble they often switch to breaststroke, or are unable to reply to questions/commands, so it was a great test to make sure I was responsive.

“With just 200 yards to go, I felt water in my goggles and started to feel a glare from the Siberian sun, which felt odd. The spectators started to cheer and I knew I was almost there. I kept going and started to prepare myself mentally to exit the water. I finished the swim, then pulled myself out on the icy ladder, took off my goggles, stood up and walked to the banya. Once I was inside, the banya ladies took over. They took care of me, putting my hands and feet in ice water, and hot towels on the rest of my body. My job was to shiver it and laugh it out, until it was time for sauna. This was one of my longest recoveries – 30-minute swim and 40-minute recovery.”

Jaimie's top three tips for beginners for marathon swimming

Practise your nutrition
before the big day

and only eat or wear things you have already tried and tested.

WEAR SUNSCREEN
– find a mix that works for you to prevent sunburn and chafing.

Always remember

that **how you feel** throughout a swim can and will change. If you hit a rough spot, just try and swim until your next feed. **Breathe through it** and any discomfort or negative feelings will almost **always dissipate**.



Jaimie preparing to swim in Antarctica

terms of history, beautiful scenery or some other sort of personal goal.

HOW DO YOU JUGGLE YOUR SWIMMING AND DAY TO DAY LIFE?

It's a challenge but I'm fortunate to have a supportive partner, an intense but often flexible job, and a streamlined life in general.

WHAT NEXT?

I am looking forward to spending a bit more time in my home waters of New York City during the summer season! I am registered for a double circumnavigation of Manhattan, 57 miles (92km) with NY Open Water's new 40 Bridges event. This is an extremely personal challenge for me, not just because of the distance, but because if all goes well, it will be my first opportunity to view our beautiful city lights from the water at night. My heart thrills at the thought of it.

RECENT SWIM HIGHLIGHTS

- First person to complete the Ice Sevens, seven ice miles in seven continents (including one at zero degrees)
- **Overall winner of the 2016 International Winter Swimming Association's World Cup**
- 42.8-mile swim across Lake Geneva, Switzerland in 28 hours 36 minutes
- **31-mile swim across Lake Como, Italy in 20 hours 29 minutes**
- 32-mile Lake George Marathon Swim in 21 hours, 12 minutes
- **28.5-mile 20 Bridges Circumnavigation Swim of Manhattan in 8 hours, 13 minutes**
- 22.5-mile circumnavigation swim of Absecon Island, New Jersey in 13 hours, 59 minutes
- **17-mile Rose Pitonof Solo in 5 hours, 1 minute**
- 17-mile swim around Lago d'Orta, Italy in 8 hours, 38 minutes
- **18.6-mile swim down the Hudson River in New York City in 6 hours 17 minutes**
- 42.8-mile swim across Lake Geneva, Switzerland in 32 hours 52 minutes
- **In 2012, Jaimie became the 64th person to complete the Triple Crown – the English Channel, Catalina Channel and Manhattan Island Marathon Swim**