

Eligible for #65

by Bill Welzien



The only way to get to #65 is to go through #64. My career #63 was accomplished on Monday, April 29, 2015. I had planned to tackle #64 on Monday, May 4; however, as I checked the weather going into the weekend, things were becoming quite windy and the winds were projected to increase. This proved accurate, as the winds on Monday were 20-25 mph. Tuesday, they predicted thundershowers. It did rain but I never witnessed anything more serious. With all that news, I decided to make my attempt on Wednesday, May 6. It was a good decision to wait.

The interesting thing about the tides is that the high tide's height and depth were the same on Monday through Thursday. The high on all four days was 1.8 and the low -0.3. What did vary was my proposed start time. If I swam in Monday, I would have taken my first stroke at 8:30 a.m. On Wednesday, I took my first stroke at 9:40 a.m. This calculation is based on the high tide in the Key West Harbor. We just go back two hours to determine the start time. We begin with the incoming tide and finish on the outgoing tide.

My kayakers on this trip were my two daughters: recently married Priscilla Weeks and my still-at-home daughter Jane (16). We borrowed a tandem kayak. We got out to Smathers Beach by 8:30 a.m. We needed each moment to prepare for our adventure. Recently, I received an email from a solo swimmer enrolled in the 39th Annual Swim Around Key West. She told me that she had purchased Desitin Maximum Strength Zinc Oxide Paste (40%). That is what I am wearing in the photos. This gal then wondered what I would be putting on my face. I put the same product on my face as on my body. Priscilla painted me with the product and she wore disposable latex

gloves. She pays special attention to detail around my face. My ears were covered, the back and sides of my neck and she carefully worked around my goggles, diligent not to touch my lenses. My thinning pate likewise covered for protection. My back and sides were thickly covered and the back of my legs, as well. There is no need to cover the belly and front of the legs unless the swimmer plans on swimming a good distance of backstroke.



I have been experimenting on how to easily remove the zinc from my body. I do not recommend Simple Green. I have tried both coconut oil and baby oil this time. At this point, I plan to use baby oil after exiting the water of the 39th Annual Swim on June 6. Run the oil all over the areas covered with zinc and let it begin to dissolve, do some rubbing and then wipe the substance off with paper towels. If you don't have baby oil, vegetable oil should work. Do this in the shade so you don't get burned with all this oil on your skin (undoing the reason you wore the zinc!). It is somewhat of an ordeal. I am told that Johnson & Johnson, who make Desitin, have a two-step process to remove the zinc from fabric. Check their website for details. My jammer swimsuit is hopelessly stained. I swam yesterday and I don't sense any skin burn today.

I concluded the trouble that comes with the zinc is worth it.

The beach preparation time took a full hour. At 9:30 a.m. I swam out to the first pole (start point). The wind was out of the east at about 8-10 mph. That meant it was at my tail and the water was quite calm. At 9:40 a.m., I began my quest to complete my career 64th swim. I should point out that I sensed a knot in my right shoulder. I noticed it a couple days before the swim, but it was more pronounced that morning as I woke up. I found myself trying to work out this cramped muscle as I drove to the beach. I wondered if it was going to be a factor while swimming the 12.5-mile course. I was concerned, but not panicked. As I swam toward White Street Pier, I was trying to stretch out. The water temperature was much cooler than my April 20th swim. It was 85 degrees then, and one month later it had dropped to 77! Hotter water brings the sea lice. In April I had plenty of itchiness; there was none of that on this swim. By my standards, 77 was a touch cool, but no problem. My ideal temperature is 80-82 degrees.

Since the wind was down, the water was clear. On the Atlantic side on the way out, I saw lots of conchs, a starfish, tarpon, barracuda, about 6-10 rays all together. This swim is a safe swim, as it is pretty shallow water. On about 70 percent of the course, you could stand up and your head would be out the water. On much of the course, you could swim to the shore without going very far. I did not see anything scary or stingy. Once you get into Key West Harbor, the water is very deep and the current was moving me forward. There were no cruise ships docked in the

Harbor, but there were some gentle. They seemed to swell higher as we neared Fleming Cut. I watched my kayakers ride up and down.

I fuelled every 30 minutes. I used Hammer Nutrition product Perpetuem. I have the Strawberry Vanilla flavor, the 32-ounce servings size. I have used this for my last several swims and plan to use it again on June 6. It is a powder that I mix with water in my sports bottles. I did this the night before and put in my refrigerator. If you used this product and had no ability to keep it cool, I would suggest mixing it the morning of the swim. I mix two scoops per bottle and I put a dollop of the Hammer Gel in each bottle. I ate nothing during my swim; I only drank. I drank about half a bottle every 30 minutes. This provided me with hydration, carbs, electrolytes and a small amount of protein. I ate a Clif Bar before I entered the water and a half bottle of Perpetuem. Why don't I eat anything I have to chew? It takes time to chew and swallow. When I drink my fuel, I ask my kayakers to stay ahead of me so I swim up to the boat. My kayakers had a string with a slipknot around the bottle. My bottle is tossed to me and I toss it back. The string keeps the overthrown bottle from floating away. I always ask my kayaker never to give me a partial bottle, only a full bottle. No sense taking a bottle only to finish it and need to get another bottle. With each bottle, the string can easily be transferred. Remember: when you make your drinks, it is better to have more than less. You don't want to run out of fuel two miles from the finish! Of course, all athletes know that one should never use a new product on race day. Make sure you have experimented well with whatever product(s) you plan to use on race day.

When I got into Fleming Cut, I had a nice, but not incredible, ride. I swim under the Fleming Bridge (Mile 5) at 2.5 hours into my swim. I was using my GPS Garmin watch. I was impressed at how accurately the miles recorded on my watch matched the mileage on our course map. I made it out to Sigsbee Island, mile 6. At this point, the back of my neck at the base of my head was sore. Why? I believe it was from looking up to look for and keep on track to my next point. My goggles were not fogging or leaking! That is a joy! I suggest having an extra pair of goggles. I always do, but have never needed to use that extra set. You don't want your goggles too tight. You don't want to restrict the flow of blood to your brain for 5-8 hours.

How was my shoulder? Sore, but I never sensed I was not going to continue. The hardest part of this swim was the two miles around Sigsbee. The wind, though not strong, caused me to dig and swim pretty strenuously for that span. I knew once I was around the corner of Sigsbee, the stroking would be easier. And it was. The closer I got to Cow Key Bridge, the easier my stroking. Upon reaching that bridge (Mile 9), I rode a nice current through the channel. As I approached the Atlantic, the water became nerve-rackingly shallow. Coming out of Cow Key Channel and around the bend into the Atlantic can be one of the most difficult parts of this course. My April swim had deeper water than this swim. As I swim along the Atlantic side, the water remained shallow but not too shallow. It was very calm and there was a slight tail wind to assist me. I swam to the finish at 6:29:04 . This was slightly better than #63.

After I got out of the water I realized how sore my right shoulder was. I also knew that it was a muscle problem and nothing serious. I was still able to put the kayak on top of my car. My shoulder was not throbbing in pain. It feels much better today. If you can afford it, you might consider a deep tissue massage a few days before you swim the 39th Annual Swim on June 6.

On April 17, I turned 65 years old. Now, having completed my 64th swim, I have earned the right to attempt my 65th career swim, thus matching my number of swims around Key West with my number of years on planet earth.

I'd like to thank my daughters who assisted me in this last swim. Priscilla kayaked for me on two previous occasions, and for Jane, this was her maiden voyage. They made sure I fueled and kept me safe from the crazy jet skiers and clueless power boaters!

I had in my car a cooler with a bottle of coconut milk with protein powder mixed in. This was my recovery drink and I downed it with a Clif Bar. Last night, I awoke at 3:30 a.m. and made myself a ham sandwich. Today, apart from some upper body soreness, I feel pretty recovered.

