

Lake Superior Relay Swim 2023

*A historic distance swim—without wetsuits—in a warming Lake Superior
August 29-30, 2023*



*An event seeking
ratification from the
Marathon Swimmers Federation*

The swim was filmed for *A Sea Change for Lake Superior*, a public television documentary about the warming of Lake Superior

Lake Superior Relay Swim 2023

An epic swim from Split Rock Lighthouse to Duluth, MN

In order to bring attention to the warming of Lake Superior's famously frigid waters due to our warming climate, a group of intrepid marathon swimmers set a new distance record for Lake Superior on August 30, 2023.

The Lake Superior Relay Swim 2023 brought together six world-class distance swimmers, including Karen Zemlin, who holds an English Channel record for women

over 50. Supported by a flotilla of support boats and monitored by independent observers, the team swam, without wetsuits, 45.6 miles from Split Rock Lighthouse State Park to Duluth, Minnesota. In this non-stop relay participants swam 60-minute rotations. The swim is under review for ratification by the international Marathon Swimmers Federation.



RELAY SWIM DETAILS AT A GLANCE

- **What.** Six seasoned marathon swimmers completed a record-setting relay swim from Split Rock Lighthouse State Park to Duluth, swimming in continuous 60-minute rotations without wetsuits. They were accompanied by two support boats, a kayak, and a zodiac.
- **When.** Swim started at 8:00 a.m. on August 29, 2023, ending at 7:30 the next morning.
- **Where.** The route began at Pebble Beach, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park (20-miles northeast of Two Harbors, MN) and ended at Lakewalk Beach (also known as Corner of the Lake Beach) in Duluth, MN.
- **Who.** The swim team consisted of the following: Karen Zemlin (55), Plymouth, MN; Seth Baetzold (28), Maplewood, MN; Michael Miller (57), Minneapolis, MN; Jeff Everett (62), Oakland, CA; Craig Collins (64), Minneapolis; William "Casey" McGrath (51), Minneapolis; and alternate swimmer David Cameron (46), Minneapolis.
- **Why.** The project's goals are to raise awareness of Lake Superior's warming due to climate change. The world's largest lake by surface area is among the fastest warming of the world's large lakes. The team will also seek ratification from the international Marathon Swimmers Federation for a new distance relay swim record for Lake Superior.

[SEE VIDEO AND PHOTOS OF THE EVENT](#)

Lake Superior Relay Swim 2023

A Documentary on the Warming of Lake Superior

Data from the Large Lakes Observatory at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, reveal that Lake Superior is among the fastest warming of the world's largest lakes. Containing ten percent of earth's surface freshwater and with the largest surface area among the world's lakes, Superior is famously cold, clean, and clear. Its natural systems and aquatic life are well adapted to waters that traditionally have averaged 40 degrees Fahrenheit year around. But in the last 40 years, as the climate has warmed, so have Superior's waters. Today surface temperatures are four- to five-degrees Fahrenheit higher than four decades ago. This change, accompanied by greater and more frequent storms and stronger winds, has had far reaching impacts.



A data-gathering glider used by EPA scientists on underwater missions that can last up to 100 days.

A Sea Change for Lake Superior, a public television documentary co-produced by Hamline University's Center for Global Environmental Education and PBS North, will explore what this change means for people, for the lake's natural systems and Superior's legacy as the greatest, coldest, and clearest of the Great Lakes.



Click the image above to view a short video preview of the documentary.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the documentary.

For more information, contact John Shepard, Producer: jshepard@hamline.edu

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Additional Facts About Lake Superior...

- ★ Lake Superior is the world's largest lake by surface area. Russia's Lake Baikal has greater volume but less surface area.
- ★ Superior holds ten percent of the world's surface freshwater. The Great Lakes, combined, hold twenty percent. Superior could hold the waters of the four other Great Lakes with room to spare. Only about one-percent of the world's water is readily available for human consumption, as 97-percent is salt water and the rest is inaccessible, most of it locked up in glaciers and groundwater.
- ★ Lake Superior's year-round temperature traditionally averages about 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The lake's surface waters have warmed four to five degrees Fahrenheit in the last 40 years due to climate change, making Superior one of the world's fastest warming large lakes.
- ★ Climate change impacts on Lake Superior have included increased severity and frequency of storm events, stronger and more pervasive winds, increased threats from invasive species, and the appearance of toxic algal blooms. Still, Superior remains the cleanest, clearest and coldest of the Great Lakes.
- ★ Plastics pollution is common in Lake Superior, found even on remote beaches. There are many ties between pervasive single-use plastics and climate change.

...and the Relay Swim

- ★ Several solo distance swims in Western Lake Superior predate the 2023 relay swim. In 1988 Canadian swimmer Vicki Keith swam 20 miles from Orienta WI to Two Harbors MN. In 2007 Canadian Paula Stephanson swam 20 miles from Port Wing WI to Two Harbors MN.
- ★ The 2023 relay swimmers faced several challenges, most notably wind-driven waves. Water temperatures remained in the 60s (Fahrenheit) for the duration—reflecting the warming of the lake. A small-craft warning and five-foot waves on the afternoon of August 29 nearly resulted in the swim being called off.
- ★ The team was prepared to shorten swim rotations had upwellings of water 52-degrees Fahrenheit or colder occurred.
- ★ Two independent observers aboard the support boats (one dive boat and one sailboat) observed the swim to ensure compliance with rules set by the international Marathon Swimmers Federation (MSF).

[LINK TO MSF SWIM RULES](#)