

# Steve Gaunt Completes Otsego Lake Swim

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By CASPAR EWIG  
COOPERSTOWN



Kiersten Gaunt gives husband Steve a good luck kiss before he starts his 9-mile swim. (Photo by Caspar Ewig)

Why does one swim the length of Lake Otsego? Because it is a challenge, and it's there. And so, at 8:02 a.m. on Sunday, July 30, Steven Gaunt plunged into 76-degree water at Council Rock to begin his 9-mile journey to Springfield Public Landing. Gaunt was accompanied by a kayak alternately paddled by his father, David Gaunt, his father-in-law, Mike Pikarsky, and friend Bill Wilson—to act as guide and to supply water and protein bars along the way—and a motorboat operated by Armin Sommer.

Gaunt, a native of Birmingham, England, immigrated to the United States in 2008, settling in San Antonio, Texas. After meeting Kiersten, his wife (and soon-to-be mother of his first child), he moved to Cooperstown in 2022.

“Armin Sommer and I first met at a church gathering, and since Armin had swum the lake in 2021, he eventually convinced me to undertake the feat,” Gaunt recounted. “Although I played sports in school, I had never swum competitively, and I certainly never swam any long distances. But it sounded interesting and I figured I was now in the best shape I'd ever be, so why not try it.”

Originally, Gaunt had planned on starting Saturday, but because the weather predictions sounded more favorable, he postponed the swim until Sunday. And, at the start, the lake lived up to its ‘Glimmerglass’ name and the wind stood still.

“For the first mile, I was making good time and things were going well, but then the weather man proved wrong,” Gaunt said. “Headwinds blew up to 15 miles per hour with white caps on the lake.”

This slowed the pace immeasurably.

“Between miles 3 and 4, I felt like I was going nowhere and, around mile 5, I hit a wall and almost wanted to quit, but my father shouted encouragement and motivated me to travel on,” Gaunt said, “All throughout I kept asking myself, ‘Why am I doing this?’ But now, 8 hours and 5 minutes later, I can say, ‘I did that,’ and I can tell my daughter when she is old enough that you can do anything when you put our mind to it, and that's what makes it all worthwhile.”

The challenge to swim the length of Otsego Lake has captivated many in the past, and the Clark Sports Center displays a plaque made and maintained by

Angus Mackie—with the names and times of many of the swimmers—who said, “Since it is self-reporting, not all people report, and also I have not been able to attach the names of all swimmers.”

However, Mackie has a list that shows at least 70 individuals have accomplished the feat since he started recording in 1973.

Over the years, there have been some notable stories. According to Mackie, the youngest recorded swimmer, at 11 years old, was Helen Zaengle in 2013, followed by her 16-year-old sister, Laurel, in 2020 and by 14-year-old Mimi Aramini, whose swim raised more than \$2,000.00 for the Community Foundation of Otsego County.

In 2014, a group of seven from the University Club in Boston held a team meet on the lake and various friends have undertaken it as a joint quest. In August of 2012, Cooperstown High School swim team members Erik and Sean Mebust and Cassidy and Eden Griger completed the swim, each encouraging the other on.

Vicky Buck and Cathy Raddatz paired up to swim the length of the lake in August 1985, although Kathy admits to hoping she would be able to exit gracefully when a violent thunderstorm struck the lake the night before. No such luck—the lake was calm and the two had a good swim.

Another successful lake swimmer, Lori Doig, recalled, “The chicken soup I made the day before was the best soup I ever tasted when they gave it to me during the race.”

The allure to take up the lake swim challenge continues. Ariadne Hodgson—a former captain of the Cooperstown High School swim team and daughter of swim coach John Hodgson—successfully completed her Otsego Lake swim on Friday, August 11.

**POSTED**

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