

BEACH BLOG



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Paddlers brave harsh conditions for Catalina Classic

August 27th, 2007 · [Post a Comment](#) · [posted by Iconnelly](#)

Laguna Beach lifeguard Steve Reinsch came out of the choppy water, eyes blood shot and sunscreen slathered over his face.

He had been paddling non stop for about seven hours by the time he reached the sand in Manhattan Beach, where supporters cheered on about 90 who emerged from the ocean after a long morning that started at 6 a.m. on Catalina Island.

"It was a great race," said Reinsch, a first-time competitor in the [Catalina Classic](#), which celebrated 52 years on Sunday. "This is what all the watermen do."



Paddleboarding goes back to the early 1920s, when surfing was introduced to Southern California from Hawaii. The surfers back then were hard-core watermen, a different breed of men who explored not just waves at the shoreline, but the entire ocean. Tom Blake, one of the most well-known names in the sport, created a hollow paddleboard in 1928, and in 1932 he set out to cross the Catalina Channel.

His journey would become a tradition in the '50s, when about a dozen people set out on the first 32-mile Catalina Classic race. It looked as if the sport would gain some momentum, but in

1961 the event was put on hiatus because of lack of interest for about 20 years.

These days, the event is back in full force. Paddleboards lined the sand after competitors came in from the water after braving the water for 32 miles.

Many of the boards this year carried a sticker honoring Weldon "Gibby" Gibson, one of the organizers of the race in the '50s who died of cancer this year.

An Orange County-based group called "[Ocean of Hope](#)" this year raised more than \$80,000 — the largest amount since the group started a few years back — for the [Sarcoma Alliance](#). Eleven paddlers for Ocean of Hope finished the race.

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Kyle Daniels, the first paddler to hit the shore on Sunday at a time of 5 hours and 47 minutes, joined the Ocean of Hope campaign for the first time this year. It was his ninth race.

"I'm glad I could be productive with my time," he said. "If I can help someone who can't do it because of health ... it makes you feel good to be out there. I'm lucky to be paddleboarding."

If you have a few moments, check out this wonderful [article](#) written by Spencer Kornhaber about Ocean of Hope and the Sarcoma Alliance.



This year's funky weather made for the roughest Catalina Classic in years. The skies were overcast and gloomy, and lightening flashed the sky at the horizon.

"It was bumpy from the start," Daniels said. "Toward the end, I was in survival pace."

For more beach stories, plus live cams and forecasts, go to ocregister.com/beaches.

-Laylan Connelly



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