

The Million Metre Challenge

Volunteers

The Million Metre Challenge (MMC) is a program that intended to encourage Masters swimmers to exercise regularly and track their progress. Participants keep a log of the metres they swim at workouts, swim competitions and recreationally. It provides recognition for those who achieve certain milestones, for example when they have swum one million metres. As a web-based program participant progress is shared and helps to build a sense of community though swimmers may live at opposite ends of the country.

Where did it come from?

Swim the Ontario Waterways (STOW) 1981 – 1995+/-

The STOW program, “a fitness incentive program for accumulating work-out distances, providing interest and challenge to fitness swimmers,” was developed by Kay Easun with graphics by Jack Galvin. The STOW was a route up the Rideau River from Kingston to Ottawa, up the Ottawa River to Mattawa, up the Mattawa River to North Bay, down the French River to Georgian Bay, down Georgian Bay to Port Severn, up the Severn River to Lake Simcoe, through the Trent Canal to Picton than along the shores of Lake Ontario and back to Kingston. A distance of 863.5 miles or 1,392.7 kilometres.

Participants in the program kept a tally of your metres swum at workouts, competitions and recreationally. Special challenging workouts earned for extra points. As an incentive, when participants were awarded pins from towns along the STOW route as they accumulated distance. There was also a reward for those who completed the entire swim.

The program cost \$5 for MSO participants or \$6.50 for others including masters from other provinces and some USMS members. The program was administered through the mail. Participants sent in their cheque to order your program and mailed in their results from time to time. MSO then reported where people were in the route on a monthly basis, focusing primarily on the leaders. This program had as many as three hundred participants in the mid-eighties but then faded away by the mid-nineties.

The Australian Million Metres Awards Program, 1970+/-

Masters Swimming Australian, formerly known as AUSSI, originally developed their Million Metre Awards program in the late 1970s. The latest version of the program was established in 2001 but additional milestone distances have been added over the years. Like the STOW it was strictly mail-based, although transmission of “report cards” which are now done by email. Report Cards submitted to Masters Swimming Australia are tabulated and the names of participants having achieved pre-set milestones are published on the website.

The TYMS version of the MMC 1999 – 2005

It was not long before Canadian Masters heard about the Australian Million Metres Awards Program and how it worked. Ontario was looking for something to replace the STOW program which had faded away. A few TYMS swimmers started to keep a record of their metres in line with the AUSSI rules as early as 1999. There was no organized program in Canada, so the logs were kept for information and amusement.

This was still the situation in 2002 when I joined the MSC Board. The Board agreed that it was important to develop more programs and services for the MSC membership. The Board's enthusiasm led to a number of new programs and awards over the next two years, including the Hud Stewart Award, the Champions patch for first place finishers at Nationals and the MSC jacket which was tirelessly promoted across Canada by Lois Adams of TYMS.

MSC volunteers make Pan-Canadian 2005

The MSC Board also took a serious look at the Million Metre Challenge and ways it could be made available to all masters swimmers.

In 2004, Lindsay Patten from New Brunswick joined the MSC Board. Lindsay had experience in computer programming and internet technology. I discussed the AUSSI MMC program with him and he felt the program could be implemented as an on-line system, with instant uploading and reporting of metres swum. By the spring of 2005 he had a working prototype in place and over the rest of the summer several members of the MSC Board and a few others tested out the program which seemed to work extremely well. All involved were volunteers.

On September 1, 2005 the MSC Million Metre Challenge was opened up to the masters swimming community across Canada and beyond, including a few from Australia.

A feature of the MSC program from 2005 to 2016 was that membership with MSC was not required and there were even some participants from Australia. Participants self-registered at no charge. They could then track their metres and view their progress against others in the Million Metre Challenge community. However, only MSC members were eligible to receive the milestone recognition awards, i.e., the caps, pins and crests.

IN September 2005, I reported on the MMC at the USMS Convention and additional conversations took place in 2006. In 2007, USMS adopted a similar program, calling it *Go the Distance*.

The Million Metre Challenge was based on the AUSSI program and initially adapted in Ontario by TYMS. Then, with the significant technical skills of Lindsay Patten, it became a national program with well over 1,000 participants. It has been the most successful pan-Canadian "fitness focused" program MSC has offered. This was volunteer enthusiasm at its best serving all adult swimmers!

Chris Smith,

Member of TYMS since 1988

Member of the MSC Board, 2002 – 2007.

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