

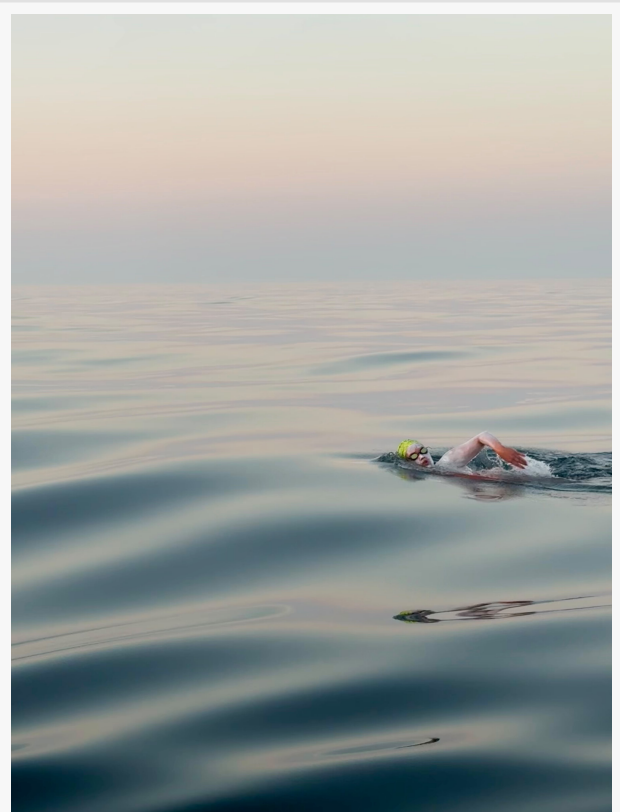
18-Year-Old Marathon Swimmer Maya Merhige Completes North Channel Swim, Her Fifth Oceans Seven Crossing

California swimmer finishes one of the world's toughest channel swims in 12 hours, 19 minutes while raising funds for cancer research with Swim Across America

PORTPATRICK, DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY, SCOTLAND, July 9, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Eighteen-year-old marathon swimmer [Maya Merhige](#) of Berkeley, California, successfully swam the North Channel, 34.5 kilometers, or 21.4 miles, from Ireland to Scotland, finishing July 8, 2026, in 12 hours, 19 minutes and 37 seconds (12:19:37). Maya completed the swim by touching the Scottish shoreline near Portpatrick. Maya not only made waves for herself, but also to support family and friends who are enduring even greater challenges, fighting cancer — with the names of those who have or are fighting that battle written on her swim cap. Maya began the swim at 4:28 a.m. Irish time in calm, glassy conditions, with the support vessel Infinity, pilot Bobby, crew Jacqueliine Kelly, her father Chris Merhige, crew chief and support swimmer Kelly Gentry, and independent (ILDSA) observer Rebekah documenting the crossing. Her land crew included her mother Liz Tung and family dog Kip who met Maya upon her landing in Scotland, and her sister Lucy cheering from California.

As Maya approached Scotland, the harbormaster raised the Scottish flag to welcome her in — a powerful finish to one of the most difficult open-water swims in the world.

The North Channel is known for powerful tides, cold water, unpredictable conditions and lion's mane jellyfish. Maya swam in water temperatures ranging from about 13.4 to 14.4 degrees Celsius, or the mid-50s Fahrenheit. Along the way, she encountered jellyfish, enduring a few stings, swam past a seal, and pushed through sore shoulders, fatigue and the punishing final stretch of the channel.



Maya Merhige swimming the North Channel as part of the Ocean's Seven, from Ireland to Scotland, July 8, 2026. Making waves to fight cancer for Swim Across America.

The swim held special meaning for Maya. It came exactly one year after she endured a major surgery last summer, part of a series of health challenges she has faced since doctors discovered a benign tumor on her pancreas following a ski accident in 2023. Hospital stays, surgeries and ongoing health issues have given Maya a deeper understanding of what patients and families endure during a health crisis — and strengthened her commitment to using her swims to help others.

“I think there’s something special about this happening exactly one year after my major surgery last summer,” Maya said before the swim. Her song for the crossing was “Back in My Body” by Maggie Rogers — a fitting anthem for a young athlete who has returned again and again to the water. Maya swims to make waves to fight cancer through Swim Across America, the nonprofit she first joined at age 9 in San Francisco to honor a family friend and three-time cancer survivor. Since then, she has raised more than \$172,000 for cancer research and has carried the names of friends and family members affected by cancer on her swim cap during her marathon swims.

“Every time I get in the water, I am carrying others with me who have had a far more challenging journey than I’m undertaking,” Maya said. “I am swimming for those whose names are on my cap, for families who need hope and for the research that can lead to better treatments.”

The North Channel is Maya’s fifth Oceans Seven swim. She completed the Catalina Channel in

2021, the Molokai Channel in 2023, the English Channel in 2024 and New Zealand’s Cook Strait in 2025. This August, she plans to attempt the Strait of Gibraltar, between Spain and Morocco, followed by the Tsugaru Strait in Japan in 2027.

The Oceans Seven is considered the aquatic equivalent of mountaineering’s Seven Summits and requires swimmers to complete seven of the world’s most challenging ocean channel crossings, solo and unassisted. If Maya completes all seven, she could become the youngest person in the world to complete the Oceans Seven, pending official

ratification and any future changes to the record.

Maya, who recently completed her freshman year at Georgetown University, has also swum the



18-year-old marathon swimmer Maya Merhige writes the names of those touched by cancer on her swim cap for her marathon swims. This is her swim cap for the North Channel, which she successfully swam July 8, 2026.

“

Every time I get in the water, I am swimming for those whose names are on my cap, for families who need hope and for the research that can lead to better treatments.”

Maya Merhige

Tahoe Triple Crown, the Manhattan 20 Bridges swim, the Angel Island swim and the Three Rocks swim in San Francisco Bay. Just a week after her 13th birthday, she became the youngest woman to swim the width of Lake Tahoe. At 14, she became the youngest woman to swim the 20-mile Catalina Channel. At 15, she became the youngest person to swim the Molokai Channel.

Nationally, Swim Across America has raised more than \$150 million for cancer research since its founding in 1987 and supports more than 60 cancer research projects annually at leading cancer institutions across the country.

To support Maya's swims and fundraising efforts, visit swimacrossamerica.org/maya.

Jeni Howard

Swim Across America

+1 203-273-4246

jeni.howard@swimacrossamerica.org

Visit us on social media:

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[YouTube](#)



Maya Merhige, 18-year-old marathon swimmer, waves before she starts her swim across the North Channel from Ireland to Scotland on July 8, 2026. Maya swam the channel to make waves to fight cancer and raise funds for cancer research with Swim Across America.

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/925308641>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.