

Lane Lines



Announcements:

- Next Committee Meeting: February 10, 2007 after 9am workout
- February 25, 2007 - Marlins Pacifica Relays

Ice swimming hot in Beijing, despite city ban

The sign at Qianhai, a manmade lake in the historic imperial section of Beijing, says not to swim. It warns of danger from deep water and plants on the lake bed.

But on a recent Friday, from before dawn to after dusk, people splashed down into the lake one after another as 20 to 25 awestruck passers-by lined up along the shore to stare.

The city rule does not stand in the way of a Beijing tradition with 38 years of history and at least 3,000 followers, mostly men aged 40 to 70, believe a couple of minutes in the icy water per day help blood circulation and ward off diseases.

The recent Friday was a typical winter's day in Qianhai's meter-deep, wading pool-sized hole in the ice.

No one is sure where the tradition started, though fingers usually point to northeast China or Russia, both hotspots for ice-hole swimming.

Although city officials say swimming is unsafe and that it may upset the tourism-targeted scenery of the six central Beijing lakes the "polar bears" frequent, swimmers say their clubs have a nod from the central government National Sports Commission and that city

enforcement officers don't want to deal with lake issues in the winter.

Suburbs, they say, are too far away.

Squabbles with the city have gone on for years with no crackdown, only a water shortage at Qianhai in 2003, said He Denglong, No. 2 man in the 20-year-old Beijing Winter Swimming Club.

Swimming, despite the warnings, is safe, he says.

"Don't get under the ice, then there's no way up," he added. Otherwise, "as long as there's no wind, swimming is OK."

Wind dangerously chills a swimmer's skin, which will redden anyway from two laps in the 1C lake water, he said. Swimming for more than a minute or two can be dangerous, too. Otherwise, the swimmers are fine, the club master said.

The club requires swimmers to acclimate themselves with daily lake outings starting from September. Just after a swim in the icy water, swimmers usually dump room temperature tap water over their bodies to re-acclimate their skin reddened from the chill.

One man's skin steamed as he doused it with water, drawing a delighted scream from an on-looking child. They then bolt

back to their clothes and jog in place for 5 or 10 minutes.

"I'm a little cool," said Sun Weijia, a daily Qianhai winter swimmer for the past five years as he jogged in place. "I need to move my body -- Or, I could eat chili peppers."

Fellow swimmer Wang Helin, 50, said: "Everything is comfortable. It's like I've re-circulated all my blood."

He swims at Qianhai three to four times a week.

Older swimmers, the overwhelming majority, say they catch fewer colds than normal by swimming in the winter because their overall disease resistance is higher.

But younger winter swimmers -- who see the activity more as a hobby than health insurance -- consider the lakes dangerous because of the city's lack of supervision.

The 10 to 20 winter swimmers in the six-year-old Green Wilds sports club in Beijing prefer outdoor pools at Tsinghua University or the eastern suburb Tongzhou to avoid water pollution, said club event organizer Wu Jiang.

The club would also like to see more safe swimming holes.

"The police can't send people (to the lakes) every day, so they swim at their own risk," Wu said.

But on Dec. 18, they organized 10 people for a lake dip and on Jan. 1, the club's official winter swimming day, about five will swim in Bohai Bay east of

Beijing.

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Marlin in View

Name: Colleen Labadie

How long have you swam with the

Marlins: Six Years

Typical workout time: 7am, but I've swam at all of them

Pool/Open Water: Emphatically BOTH!!

Favorite Stroke: Butterfly

Favorite Event/Swim: Alcatraz

Pets: Ms. Chelsea, the adorable love-bug of a dog and self appointed mascot for the Marlins at Worlds!

Best memory so far: Hot Showers after a cold swim

Why do you swim: The comraderie and because I'm part fish (slow, but love the water) Favorite color : Sunshine Yellow

Occupation: Project Manager

Favorite ice cream: Soy Vanilla



February 2007

Sat, Feb. 10, USF Valentine's Day Affair

Sun, Feb. 25, SMMM Pacifica Relays

March 2007

Sat, Mar. 17, Rinconada Masters Spring Meet

Sat, Mar. 24, SCAM Invitational

Lanes Lines is edited by Henry Chan. For questions, concerns, or to submit content for future issues, send to hymc219@hotmail.com. Always remember, keep swimming!