



Melbourne's year-round open water swimming group

Lead Article - Winter Solstice Swim 2026

Winter Solstice Swim – 20th June 2026

The annual Iceberger Winter Solstice Swim took place on Saturday 20th June 2026. Approximately 70 Icebergers participated (pictured below). Air temp. was 12.7°C with a chill southerly wind; water temp. averaged 13°C.



The swim-off at sunset (pictured below) was accompanied by the highland bagpipes played by world-renowned bagpiper George Henderson (left). The swim was followed by music and merriment at the RBYC clubrooms.

Well done to Event Director Sheree Reynolds for organising her first Winter Solstice Swim and many thanks to Ken Broadhurst for the Life Saving Victoria rescue equipment.



All photos by Ria





PENGUIN CLASSICS



My winter read this year is the 1844 French classic: *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas. Apart from its weight and the three months of my life I will expend on reading this door-stopper, it is remarkable for one of the great swimming escapes in literature.

The protagonist in the novel, Edmond Dantès, falsely accused of being a Bonapartist and wrongly incarcerated for 14 years in a dungeon on Chateau d'If off Marseille in France, made a remarkable escape in 1829 by substituting himself in the body bag of his deceased fellow prisoner. The body bag, with Dantès' very-much-alive body, was then tied by the guards with a cannon ball attached and cast into the sea. Dantès cut his way out of the bag and severed the cannon ball, all whilst being tossed on a wild sea.

Dantès then started swimming, frantically, in the pitch darkness from the Château d'If across the bay of Marseille to the rocky island of Île Tiboulén. Dumas described the ocean conditions as "a heavy, bitter swell" where "each time he [Dantès] reached the highest point of a wave, he quickly surveyed the visible horizon and tried to penetrate the blackness".

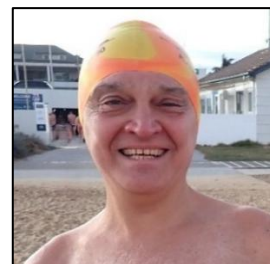
The vivid description of this fictional ocean swim is remarkable as it was written by Dumas in the days when open water swimming was scarcely known and swimming at the time comprised a style more akin to a timid, semi-vertical breast stroke; nevertheless, it was bold, imaginative writing.

Dantès swam to freedom and would later become the self-titled Count of Monte Cristo and exact his revenge on those who wrongly incarcerated him but it was swimming that saved his life and thus, through literary fiction, his dramatic escape foreshadowed the modern day Triple Break of prison swims involving:

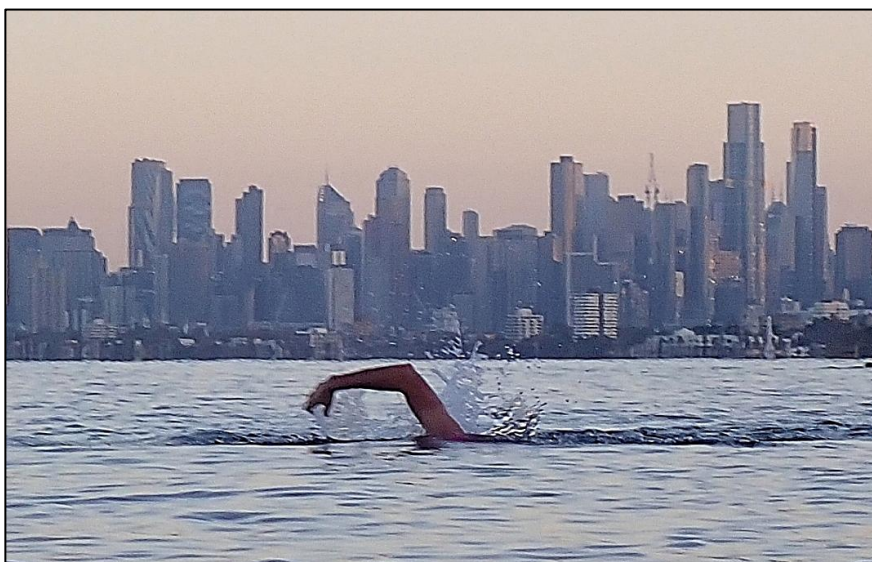
- **Alcatraz Island** (San Francisco, USA, 2kms) - made famous by the possible escape in June 1962 of Frank Morris and brothers John and Clarence Anglin.
- **Château d'If** (Marseille, France, 5kms) - the fictional prison of the Count of Monte Cristo and now the annual Défi de Monte Cristo swim.
- **Robben Island** (Cape Town, South Africa, 7.5kms) - the island prison of Nelson Mandela and now the iconic Freedom Swim.

As I was preparing this article, I received a very coincidental email from Iceberger Brett Davis who, on 6th June 2026, completed the Château d'If - Défi de Monte Cristo - swim off the Marseille coast emulating Dantès great feat.

Brett completed the swim in a time of 1:54:26 with a water temperature of 17°C and thereby achieved the Triple Break of prison swims which adds to Brett's Australian Triple Crown of Marathon swimming (refer to Newsletters 16/1/25, 27/3/25 and 24/4/25) as well as past successful crossings of the English Channel (2015), Alcatraz Invitational (2016), Straits of Messina (2018), Gibraltar Strait (2019), Isle of Wight circumnavigation relay (2022) and Lake Geneva (2023) (refer Newsletter 3rd July 2025).



Brett Davis right.



David Hallam and Melbourne City profile - 9th March 2026 photo by Ria

