

# DAILY BREEZE

## Runners ‘conquer’ the Vincent Thomas Bridge during annual Labor Day event



The contestants of the 14th Annual Conquer the Bridge Race cross the halfway point on the Vincent Thomas bridge in San Pedro, CA on September 4th, 2023. (Photo by Gil Castro-Petres, Contributing Photographer)

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In what's become a Labor Day tradition in San Pedro and beyond, crowds of runners, walkers and selfie-takers headed up and down the landmark Vincent Thomas Bridge early Monday morning, Sept. 4, for the 5.3-mile Conquer the Bridge event.

The nonprofit event draws thousands to the Harbor Boulevard starting line each Labor Day, from competitive runners to folks who just like to challenge themselves with either a run or sweat-inducing walk over the arched, green span that crosses over the Port of Los Angeles to Terminal Island.

Volunteers arrive in the pre-dawn hours to make the final touches on the course, setting up water and first-aid stations.

The course isn't easy.



Various members of the Long Beach Running Club pose for a photo before they compete in the 14th Annual Conquer the Bridge Race in San Pedro, CA on September 4th, 2023. (Photo by Gil Castro-Petres, Contributing Photographer)

“This race reflects the community,” race founder and organizer Michael-Patrick Hogue said in a 2018 SCNG [interview for what was the event’s 10th year](#). “It’s a blue collar event and it’s hard. You sweat and you’ve got to work. This is a race that’s tough.”

The opportunity to travel the bridge on foot also provides a unique view opportunity for participants who take no shortage of photos from the top. Participants, locals and those coming from out of state, include serious competitive runners, along with groups of local moms, neighbors and health-and-fitness groups who decide to step up to the challenge.

Getting permits initially for the race, though, proved challenging, with Hogue navigating a bureaucratic obstacle course that included state, city and port agencies. That, alone, took nearly two years, he said.

The first race, on Labor Day 2009, drew 1,500 participants — and signups have grown steadily ever since. The event recently hit around 3,000 participants, except perhaps for the 2017 race that took place amid a crushing, mega heat wave. That prompted the race start-time to be moved up earlier by one hour in the years since, but Monday's highs were expected to be mild, in the mid-70s.

The bridge is able to be closed to traffic for several hours on Labor Day morning because both the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are closed for what is a union contract holiday.

With permits now solidly in place, the event plays out like clockwork. But a future full or partial bridge closure for needed road work by Caltrans — starting tentatively sometime in 2025 — could pose more hurdles for Hogue as that timeframe draws closer.

As soon as this year's race is put to bed, he said, that planning challenge will move to the top of his "to-do" list.