

IT'S A LONG WAY, BABY

By Barbara Del Piano, Photos By Pam Davis



OCC 1: Mary Smolenski, Jane Stevens, Kisi Haine. Back: Paula Crabb, Donna Kahakui, Megan Jones, Traci Phillips, Maile Cluney, Megan Clark. Not pictured: Diana Allen.

OCC 3: Front: Keala Kilcoyne, Meleana Carr, team mom Tiare Finney. Back: Anne Marie Mizuno, Lisa Irish, Tiare Salassa, Debbie Ing, Sarah Field, Kendra Epstein, Robin Beck, Katie Moore. Not pictured: Michele St. John.



Jane Stevens, Kisi Haine and Diana Allen at Hale O Lono Harbor.



Forty-one miles is indeed a long way, especially if you're a woman paddling a canoe through choppy seas and blustery winds in scorching hot weather for nearly half a day. But that's what 69 crews with a total of more than 700 wahine did on Sunday, September 24, in the 27th annual Na Wahine O Ke Kai.

That four of the crews were from Outrigger is a stunning example of our Club's dedication to, and participation in the challenging sport of outrigger canoe paddling.

Duke Kahanamoku Beach at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Hotel was lined with spectators waiting for the lead canoe to round Diamond Head. Hula halau in bright costumes waited to perform, while a group of men held the strings of dozens of colorful balloons that formed an arch through which the winners would pass. Fire boats shot geyser-like streams of water into the brilliant blue sky.

When the first sighting was made about 1:15 p.m., there were not one but two canoes neck and neck. The race was too close to call until Team Bradley, with a last valiant push, crossed between the bright orange buoys 16 seconds ahead of Hui Lanakila in a spectacular finish.

Outrigger's first crew paddling the *Henry Keawe Ayau*, consisted of Kisi Haine, Paula Crabb, Megan Clark, Jane

Stevens, Maile Cluney, Diana Allen, Megan Jones, Traci Phillips, Mary Smolenski, and Donna Kahakui. They came in fifth in 5:58:52, giving Outrigger the enviable distinction of being the only Club to finish in the top five spots in every race since Na Wahine O Ke Kai was established in 1979. Between them, the crew boasts more than 100 Molokai crossings.

Outrigger 3 won the koa division in 6:47:25; paddling the Club's treasured *Kakina* were Robin Beck, Sarah Field, Keala Kilcoyne, Lisa Irish, Katie Moore, Debbie Ing, Tiare Salassa, Meleana Carr, Kendra Epstein and Michele St. John.

Outrigger 2, in 13th place in 6:14:12, consisted of Jen Bossert, Lisa Livingston, Erika Eberhart, Jenni Horner, Genie Kincaid, Kristin Lee, Vanessa Beaton, Vaima Philpotts, Laurie Lawson and Kanesa Duncan. They paddled in the *Kekio*.

Outrigger 4, with Hilary Denison, Mary Moriarty, Natalie Sokol, Kristine Reisdorf, Janna Arakaki, Pam Davis, Shannon Piper, Lori McCarney, Wendy Wichman and Tracy Bradley, paddled the *Kainalu*. This crew was a combination of first-timers and a few mentors to help them along. They finished in 49th place in 6:58:17.

Sponsored by the Hawaii Tourism Authority, Anheuser Busch (who donated a \$5,000 cash prize to the winner) and



OCC 4: Front: Hilary Denison, Mary Moriarty, and Jana Arakaki. Back: Shannon Piper, Lori McCarney, Natalie Sokol, Kristine Reisdorf, Pam Davis. Not pictured: Tracy Bradley, Wendy Wichman.



OCC 2: Front: Laurie Lawson, Erika Eberhart, and Lisa Livingston. Back: Jen Bossert, Kristin Lee, Jenni Horner, Vaima Philpotts, Kanesa Duncan. Not pictured: Genie Kincaid, Vanessa Beaton.



Canoes are lined up at the start of the Na Wahine O Ke Kai on Molokai.

scores of local businesses and organizations, the Oahu Hawaii Canoe Racing Association event is the world's premier women's long distance outrigger canoe race.

Not only do women do the paddling and steering, but they run the whole shebang. All members of Na Wahine O Ke Kai Association's Board of Directors, and all race officials are women. But they are the first to admit they get a lot of help from the men.

Nearly 25 years before the first Na Wahine O Ke Kai on October 15, 1979, women petitioned for such a race, but the idea of wahine surviving the treacherous waters of the Kaiulu Channel and miles of open ocean was considered far too dangerous. But perseverance and persistence finally paid off, and a two-canoe trial run in 1975 proved women capable of the challenge.

But there's more to organizing a race of this magnitude than getting it sanctioned. Myriad requirements such as sponsors, insurance, escort boats, fund-raising, committees, etc. took a few years, but it finally happened; the rest is history.

The first race in 1979, with 17 crews competing, was won by Outrigger Canoe Club with a crew consisting of Anne Hogan, Anita Minter, Kaiulu Downing, Sue Olds, Tiare Richert (Finney), Diane Smart, Connie Maguire (Young), Sharon Bintliff, Susie Johnston (Hemmings), Monte Costa, Michele St. John, and Traci Phillips. The 1980 race was cancelled because of giant 30-foot waves, but Outrigger has par-

ticipated in every race since and won in 1981, 1984, 1985, and 1992.

Outrigger paddlers Michele St. John and Traci Phillips participated in the inaugural race in 1979 and were among those wielding oars on September 24. Michele has not paddled during the interim although she's been actively involved in coaching, mentoring, or just cheering the team on. Frequently she accompanies the crew in the escort boat, helping to guide it over the rough ocean waters.

Paula Crabb, Mary Smolenski, Kisi Haine, (assistant Club Captain) Donna Kahakui, Genie Kinkaid, and Lisa Livingston are just some who made the crossing numerous times and show no signs of giving up soon.

In addition to paddling this year, Lisa Livingston shopped, shipped and prepared food for all 40 Outrigger paddlers and their support crew during their Molokai stay. Erica Eberhart's mother, visiting from the mainland, flew to Molokai to lend a hand.

Besides paddling, Jenifer Bossert spent hours on end fulfilling her role as the Club's Canoe Racing Chair. Liz Perry, who has made many crossings, is presently Novice Women's A and B coach. Women's Head Coach, Ian Forester, has a great bunch of gals to work with.

Na Wahine O Ke Kai affords a sense of accomplishment, an incomparable challenge, and generates a strong spirit of teamwork which brings paddlers back year after year. Win, lose, or draw, crossing that channel is a feat to be proud of.