

# OffShore wins 10th Na Wahine O Ke Kai



*OffShore paddlers rejoice as they finish what was a brutal race.*

Photo by George F. Lee, Star-Bulletin

## 'Awful crossing' another OffShore win

By Jack Wyatt

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For California's OffShore Canoe Club, winning yesterday's Bankoh Na Wahine O Ke Kai for the 10th time in 11 years was a gift made in heaven.

But for most of the record 56 women's crews, paddling from Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor to Waikiki's Duke Kahanamoku Beach was a voyage from Hades.

"Winning at least made this awful channel crossing tolerable," said OffShore's JoJo Toepfner, the only participant to have paddled all 18 Na Wahine O Ke Kai events.

"Brutal - a long, hard, tiring workout," said OffShore's Cathy Ho Whitford after her team's club's six-hour, 46-minute and 33-second winning effort.

Because of headwinds, an adverse current and lack of good waves to surf, yesterday's paddling contest resulted in the third slowest winning finish since racing began in 1979. Outrigger Canoe Club posted the slowest winning time (6:50:31) in 1985.

Last year, OffShore completed the 41 miles in a course record 5:24:32.

"The Kaiwi Channel didn't give our crew an inch. My paddlers earned this win right from the beginning," OffShore coach Billy Whitford said.

"Tough paddling but great cross-training for soccer," said Outrigger paddler and soccer standout Starr Dawson.

Not only was the race long and hard but the trek turned into a raging battle for OffShore, second place Australia (6:51:41) and third place Outrigger (6:52:03).

"OffShore took the lead from the start, then we caught and passed them. Then OffShore regained the lead. That's how the race went," said Outrigger's coach Steve Scott.

OffShore, followed by Australia, paddled a direct course to Oahu, while Outrigger veered slightly north.

"We made a right turn at Koko Head hoping to catch a favorable current inside and surf a few good waves," said Outrigger steerswoman Kisi Haine. "Unfortunately, inside there was nothing (helpful)."

Meanwhile, OffShore took a line between and slightly ahead of both Outrigger and Australia.

"I was forced to cover them both. I couldn't afford to let either crew get away," Whitford said.

The OffShore coach credits his crew's determination. "They dug deep. They wanted this 10th win badly," he said.

"Great competition," OffShore steerswoman Mindy Clark said. "Several crews were in a position to win."

Olympic kayak paddlers helped power the top three crews. They included OffShore's Anna Olsson and Dru Van Hengel; Australia's Katrin Borchert and Shelley Oates and Outrigger's Traci Phillips.

"A hard but fun race. And fortunately, not near the pressure of the Olympics," said OffShore's Olsson, a Swedish Olympian and winner of four kayaking medals since 1984.

OffShore's crew also included four super-fit California firefighters - Gina Aubrey, Sharon Attlesey, Vicki Mills and Julie Wolfe.

Honolulu's Donna Meyer jumped at the opportunity to fill in as a replacement paddler on the OffShore team.

"The thrill of my paddling life," she said after her first Molokai race win.

Lanikai Canoe Club, 11th in 7:26:13, was the first koa canoe finisher. The Windward Oahu club won \$1,000. No prize money was given to the faster fiberglass canoes.

"A race this long, this difficult should have a \$100,000 purse. Sponsor money is out there," Whitford said.

Honolulu's Lokahi-4 won the masters (35 years and over) division, finishing 23rd overall in 7:47:25.

Big Island's Keauhou-2 topped the senior masters (45+) finishing 34th in 8:02:59.

Open division koa and fiberglass teams were allowed 10 women - six paddling and four substitutes. Masters teams had 12 in their respective crews.