

Have Paddle, Will Travel

By Barbara Del Piano



Paddling around the Island of Tahaa were Mary Smolenski (stroking), Lisa Livingston (seat 5) and Nicole Wilcox (steering).



Paddling in Tahiti in 1995 were Mary Smolenski, Nicole Wilcox, Starr Dawson and Lisa Livingston.



Dragon Boats (background) are larger than Swan Boats.

As she watched the small, decorated paper boats float down the Chao Phraya River, Lisa Livingston felt a sense of harmony with the place, the people and the water as she stood among the crowds on the river's edge. This festival of Loy Krathong is a tribute to the river whose waters are such an integral part of the lives of the people of Thailand. In it they bathe, fish, travel from place to place, irrigate their crops, and build their homes and markets along its banks.

These tiny symbolic boats are a gift to the waters and are intended to take away the mistakes and misfortunes of the past year, leaving only a good and a peaceful life ahead. Lisa found it a hauntingly spiritual experience to witness this oldest of

Thailand's festivals, established more than 700 years ago.

Nicole Wilcox remembers nights spent in a sleeping bag in a huge, open fale in Apia, Western Samoa. Every morning three men and three women would come and hang great stalks of bananas from the rafters. She has never seen such a variety. She reminisces about the Samoan luau, and the many types of fish, most cooked in coconut milk, and the abundance of fresh fruit growing wild in the area.

Tricia Nagatani's memories include climbing to the top of the hill behind Anse Vata bay at

Noumea, New Caledonia, to view a spectacular scene of pristine waters and a coastline crenelated with small bays and inlets; strolling along beautiful unspoiled beaches, rife with shells and cat's eyes . . . like Hawai'i of long ago.

Cathy Ho Whitford especially enjoyed renewing friendships on Hamilton Island with the many Australians she had met in Hawai'i. She was amazed at the tides, reaching heights of 10 to 12 feet during normal conditions.

Mary Smolenski was impressed with the genuine hospitality extended to her when she traveled to Tahiti with 15 other wahine who stayed in a private home during their visit.

Although their hosts were obviously not well-to-do, they overwhelmed their guests with enormous meals,

consisting in large part of a variety of fish prepared with lime juice and coconut milk called poisson cru, which might be compared to a Tahitian version of lomi salmon.

While in the Society Islands, Mary and her traveling mates had the opportunity to visit Raiatea, Huahine, Bora Bora, and Moorea. Her fondest memories are of the warm and friendly people, and the unspoiled beauty she encountered. Mary sees a lot of similarity between Papeete and Hilo.

These are just a few of the memories these and other young OCC women cherish and many of them look forward to future trips to exotic places in the years to come.

They ventured to the South Pacific not as tourists, but as paddlers in a series of international canoe racing events which are attracting ever larger numbers of paddlers, both men and women, from all over the world.

Five events presently comprise the list of major international canoe racing competitions, including the Molokai Hoe and Na Wahine iKe Kai and the Catalina Races. The others are the World Championship Canoe Sprints, commonly called the World Sprints, which is considered the Olympics of outrigger canoe racing.

This biennial event is held in a different locale each time. The 1996 races, the seventh in the history of the event, were held in New Caledonia.

Tahiti hosts the annual Hawaiki Nui Va'a, first attended by OCC wahine paddlers in The Hamilton Cup, which takes place on the resort island of Hamilton, off the coast of Australia, consists of a rigorous series of races.

The most unique of all the canoe races, however, is the annual Swan Boat Races held each year in Bangkok, Thailand, where Hawai'i is usually well represented.

Two organizations, the 20 year old International Polynesian Canoe Federation (IPCF), which sponsors the World Sprints, and the International Hawai'i Canoe Association (IHCA), which helps to send Hawai'i paddlers to the competition, have been instrumental in promoting outrigger canoe paddling worldwide.

More than a dozen countries are represented in the IPCF, in addition to France and Italy, which recently joined, and who will be sending crews to participate in the coming season. One of the federation's major goals is to have outrigger canoe paddling recognized as an Olympic sport.

The IHCA was founded in 1965 by Outrigger legend, A. E. "Toots" Minneville. "Toots" was one of the first to suggest the 41 mile Moloka'i to Oahu Race, long before it became a reality. ~ The first World Championship Canoe Sprints were held in 1984 in Long Beach, California.

Outrigger members Traci Phillips, of Olympic

kayak fame, Tiare Finney and Jeanne Jenkins participated in the women's races. Ten years later, Nicole Wilcox and Tricia Nagatani entered the competition in Apia, Western Samoa.

Last year, when the World Sprints were held in Noumea, New Caledonia, Tricia and Lisa Livingston were among approximately 600 top paddlers, both men and women, from around the world who made up nearly 200 crews, including several from Hawai'i. The Hawai'i women brought home both a silver and bronze medal.

The IHCA, sponsor of the Hawai'i teams, solicits both individual and corporate financial support to make it possible for these crews to compete. Outrigger member Gaylord Wilcox has been involved with this organization for many years.

In addition to Outrigger members, wahine paddlers from other Hawaii canoe clubs participate as well. Lisa Livingston expressed her feeling that getting to know these women, and to be paddling with, rather than against them, has been one of the many rewards of international competition.

The crews from Tahiti, who are well known for their relentless power and stamina, are always formidable opponents but extremely gracious hosts at their annual Hawaiki Nui Va'a, which takes place each November in Papeete.

In 1995, the first year Hawai'i wahine participated, Outrigger's Starr Dawson, Kelly Fey, Mary Smolenski, Lisa Livingston, Nicole Wilcox and Tricia Nagatani paddled their way into fifth place.

The following year, Mary, Nicole, Lisa, Jackie Muller, Darcie Wilcox and Ceecee Sheehan paddled with a crew that came in third.

Australia's Hamilton Cup, held each year in June, is particularly challenging. The competition, in addition to a series of sprints, consists of an iron race around Hamilton Island in which no changes are allowed, and a long distance race, with changes, around Hamilton and several smaller islands as well. Paddling conditions are particularly difficult because of unusually high tides and powerful currents which are normal for the area.

Mary Smolenski, Sara Ackerman, Nicole Wilcox, Diana Clifford, Malia Kamisugi, Katy McCrary Graf, Cathy Ho Whitford, Kisi Haine, Kaili Chun and Donna Kahakui traveled Down Under in 1993 to take part in these races, and in 1995, Mary, Nicole, Katy, and Sara were joined by Lisa Livingston, Pam Clifford, Jennifer Thayer, Jackie Muller, Vanessa Lowe, Jennifer Lowe McTigue, Robin Nonaka and Shannon Dudgeon. Cathy Ho Whitford participated again in 1996.

The most unique of all canoe racing competitions is the annual Swan Boat races in Bangkok, Thailand. These long slender teak boats, with projecting bows



carved in the form of mythical creatures, have no ama. The crew consists of 22 paddlers, including a "whistler" and steersman.

Paddlers sit side by side, and because of the cramped space, their movements are severely restricted. Used to alternating sides, the outrigger paddlers found it difficult to adjust their bodies to the stress of paddling only on one side, but by altering their body movement, they were able to adjust to the stress.

Swan boat competition has existed in Thailand for at least 700 years. Like outrigger canoes, the craft were used in ancient times to transport armies in times of war and also to provide basic water transportation.

Women were first invited to participate in the September races in 1992, in honor of Queen Sirikit's 60th birthday. The following year, Outrigger members Kristen Kenney, Tia Payes, Lisa Livingston, Missy Mowat, Tracy Selling, Darcy Wilcox, Tricia Nagatani and Cathy Ho Whitford accepted the invitation. Cathy has gone every year since and has become one of the organizers of the Hawai'i contingent.

In 1993, Nicole, Cathy and Lisa placed third. The following year, Cathy, Lisa and Tricia Nagatani were part of an all-Hawai'i team that paddled an incredible race to beat the national Thai team, the first time they had ever lost. The winning time was the fastest ever recorded for a women's crew.

Two men are allowed to crew on the women's boat and Gaylord Wilcox and Billy Philpotts have served as "whistler" and steersman respectively. In 1997, Outrigger wahine again plan to ply their oars in the waters of the South Pacific.

The World Sprints, which will take place in Fiji, are sure to attract many of our Club paddlers who will not only enjoy the thrill of the competition among the world's finest, but will have the opportunity to share in new cultural experiences. ☐

OCC women were part of the Swan Boat Races in Chao Phraya River in Thailand in 1994. Gaylord Wilcox is the whistler and Billy Philpotts steered.



Competition is keen in the Hamilton Cup Iron Race, with Pam Clifford, giving it her all.



Canoes line the beach in New Caledonia prior to the race.