

# Harry Huffaker's Tri-Island Swim

Dr. Harry Huffaker, who successfully swam the Molokai Channel in both directions, made a daring attempt to swim from Lanai to Maui and finally to Molokai on September 28 to raise money for the Hawaii Rotary Youth Foundation.

Harry completed the first two legs of the swim but half-way through the final leg from Maui to Molokai, he was forced to cancel because of heavy seas and impending darkness.

Harry trained for a year for the swim and made his first attempt in May, 1989. In the first swim, he completed the first leg between Lanai and Maui in 6 hours and 41 minutes, but then had to abort the crossing between Maui and Molokai because a large wave hit him on the back, causing his back to spasm.

He continued his training during June, July and August and finally the weather conditions appeared to be right in September. Harry gathered his support crew on Lanai to begin the incredible journey.

His story was documented by Harry Soukop of the Rotary Club of Waikiki in the following Swim Log, provided to us by Harry.

## The Swim Log

**September 27, 1989**

**10:30 p.m.**

Lahaina—The kayak is put aboard the support ship, *Pardner*, a sparkling 46-foot ketch of the Cal line, skippered by Captain Duane Dood Taylor.

**11:31 p.m.**

Lanai—Crew lands on the beach at Lanai.

**11:57 p.m.**

The support crew and Harry hold hands. A prayer by Ron Hochuli.

**September 28, 1989**

**1:01 a.m.**

Harry plunges into the water and soon disappears in the darkness to start his



*Harry Huffaker during tri-channel swim.*

second attempt to achieve the impossible.

**6:36 a.m.**

Maui-Lahaina Beach—Harry had completed the first crossing between Lanai to Maui, 13 miles, in 5 hours 35 minutes. Water temperature was 79 degrees. Harry looked OK, but shivering. He ate some fruit; drank chocolate milk; had his legs massaged by Mike Delaney and an ice pack on the back to relieve the muscles.

By comparison, this swim was almost one hour less than last May's attempt. This was a tremendous success and very promising for the next leg.

For most of the night's crossing, Harry was invisible. The exception was during feeding times when Norman Berg would come alongside the support boat in his kayak to bring nourishment for Harry. This had to be done quickly since the lights on his kayak were all that Harry had for reference points while swimming. It was hard enough staying on course when the kayak was nearby. It was very crucial the exchange of food and drink was done quickly.

All though the night, we heard the splashing sound of Harry's hands hitting the water, a sound few of us will ever forget. Forty-eight strokes per minute. No more. No less. The precision of a Swiss watch. We quickly became used to the rhythm and it was comforting to know that Harry was fine

and in full command out there in the dark.

Karl Bathan and Rick Grigg, both oceanographers, were constantly plotting the course; checking the precise route to take to pick up favorable currents as we came closer to Maui.

Then came the surprise. A faint outline of the Maui shore. Above it, Haleakala, hulled in threatening dark, massive clouds. Soon, very soon, we would beach on Maui. As Harry said a while later, "One down. Two to go."

**6:55 a.m. Maui-Molokai**

Harry was on his way. A good 11 miles. Mike Delaney now was swimming alongside, supporting Harry. Both knew this crossing was the test of endurance. Here was a 56-year-old coach swimming alongside his life-time protégé. What a sight! Almost identical strokes; four arms, silhouetting in the glittering sunlight; ploughing through an ocean so blue, in striking harmony, as if directing the endless on-rolling waves.

We started out okay. The water was calm. The forecast: "Variable winds. No chops." The morning light of a rising sun promised a fine day ahead.

However, it was not to be.

**8:30 a.m.**

The winds pick up, waves 3-5-feet. All now knew it was to be a long, hard crossing. There were several breaks to feed the swimmers. Harry did not respond to most of the calls and wanted to keep going. However, nourishment meant energy. As Ron Hochuli pointed out, it was of great importance to maintain that energy level to avoid dehydration. The hours crept by. Occasionally, Jim Cox would jump into the water to swim alongside Harry and Mike just to render some mental support.

We could not come too close to the swimmers because of the tremendous movement of the water. Tommy Haynes had now taken over the kayak

from Norman Berg who had paddled throughout the night. Haynes also had a hard time staying close to the swimmers. Yet, it was important to keep them on course. By mid-day, it was obvious the weatherman had miscalculated. The weather was not going to ease up. Big swells endlessly battered the swimmers. At times, the whole kayak disappeared from sight.

#### 12:05 p.m.

The decision was made to go straight to Molokai, thereby taking advantage of the currents, instead of drifting off to a more westerly point on shore as originally planned. In retrospect, this may not have been a wise move. Motivated to get the swimmers on shore as fast as possible to bring relief seemed to be the thing to do. As it turned out, the distance to shore was greater than expected. This put an extra burden on the swimmers. Now, they had to swim against the current at times in order to reach the reef opening to the beach.

#### 1:25 p.m. Fukoo Beach, Molokai

Swimming time, 6 hours 30 minutes. Later, on the beach, both swimmers admitted this to be the toughest part of the crossing. It had used up a lot of extra energy. Harry was hurting, nevertheless in good spirits. After a massage, a hot drink, an ice pack on the back, some encouraging words of advice from buddy Delaney. It was time for the last crossing. What courage and commitment it took to get back into the water. This time, Mike Spalding of Maui would swim with Harry. Also an excellent swimmer, Mike would give direction to Harry and support him in every way possible.

#### 1:50 p.m.

Off to Lanai. The excitement grew. The expectation and feasibility of a successful swim started to become a good reality. This had never been done before. Nobody had ever swam two crossings and here, Harry was on his third and last channel.

But, there were troubles. By calculation, it would be a six-plus hour swim. This would put Harry on Shipwreck Beach, Lanai, at approximately 8 p.m. in total darkness. Anyone who is familiar with this spot on Lanai knows how treacherous this reef can be. A 400-foot freighter, lying on its side is rusting evidence.

#### 4:15 p.m.

Harry and Mike had reached open sea, six miles off Molokai. The pace was about one mile an hour faster than the first 26 miles. There was a breeze and following seas to help them.

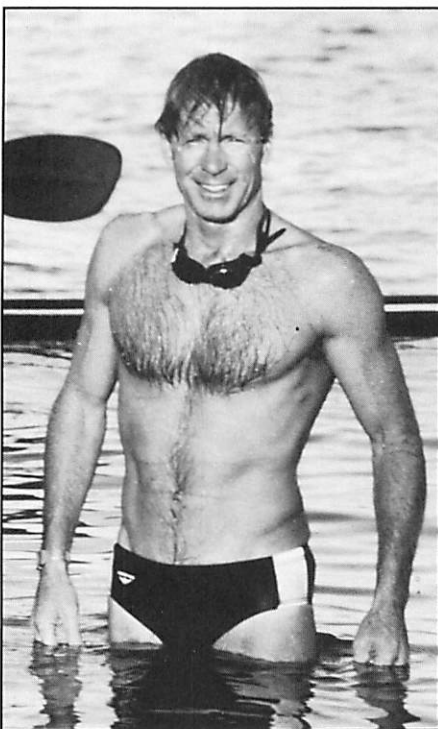
Hours go by. Harry and Mike were still going strong . . . drinking some hot chocolate at each hour. The winds were strong. The swells, high. The chops, nasty. Harry breathes to his left and the spray, if not a whole wave, would blow in his face. His tongue was very swollen by this time.

On board the support ship everything was stowed away as the rocking was tremendous. Nothing could be left on deck or loose. On several occasions, gusts of ocean would spray the entire deck and soak everything.

Despite all of this, there was a sort of routine in the whole thing. Harry kept swimming. Bathen and Grigg kept plotting the course. The skipper was tireless, steering the ship.

The almost peaceful routine came to a sudden end. Tommy Haynes in the kayak, came alongside and shouted to us, "Harry feels he may pass out. he wants to tread water for a while and take a long rest. I will blow the whistle if something occurs."

Harry quickly paddled back to the swimmers.



Dr. Harry Huffaker

## OCC Adventurer's Club

Dr. Harry Huffaker will be the speaker at the next meeting of the OCC Adventurer's Club on Wednesday, January 24 at 7 p.m. in the Board Room.

He will show the video "Harry Does Hawaii", a documentary on his tri-island swim in September, 1989.

All Club members are invited to attend.

Although this maneuver had taken less than half a minute, the whole support crew was on deck, instantly, as if called by magic. From that moment everything went rapidly. Mike Delaney and Jim Cox plunged into the ocean to help, if needed. A blitz conference between Karl Bathen, Rick Grigg and Ron Hochuli was held and a decision was made.

#### 5:13 p.m.

The conference decision was to bring Harry to the inflatable raft and pull him in. Seconds later, Harry was pushed into the raft. This brought an abrupt end of a courageous swim, and year of preparation, hardships and sacrifices, hopes and dreams.

This was a wise decision. The late arrival in darkness at Shipwreck Beach; the sea conditions as they were, prohibiting the kayak and the support ship to be close to the swimmers; Harry's condition, all were factors that led to the wise decision to abort the swim. Harry's safety was at stake and had to be protected at any cost.

Minutes later, Harry was down below and went out like a light . . . after 16 hours 10 minutes of swimming . . . only three hours short of his goal.

Although we all felt somewhat dejected and disappointed, we soon found consolation in the fact that Harry had proven it was swimmable; that he had not failed in his attempt and that no man on earth had ever swam this distance between the three islands. An achievement that can hardly be put into words. ☺