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Wahine canoe race Sunday

Twenty-one women's crews from Hawaii, California, Canada and Tahiti will compete in the 7th annual Na Wahine O Ke Kai outrigger canoe race from Molokai to Waikiki Beach on Sunday. Kai Opuia Canoe Club from Kona is the only Big Island crew entered.

Defending champion **Outrigger Canoe Club** hopes to better its 1984 record-setting win of 6 hours, 12 minutes and 11 seconds.

The race is scheduled to begin at 7 a.m. at Hale-O-Lono Harbor near Laau Point on Molokai and the first canoe is expected to cross the finish line at Fort DeRussy Beach in Waikiki sometime after 1 p.m.

The race is 40.8 miles long and paddlers will be facing strong currents, waves and the ocean swell as they paddle through the Kaiwi Channel toward Oahu.

Each team will have a crew of 12 paddlers, six of whom will be in the boat at any given time. The starting crew of paddlers will paddle for 30 straight minutes before the first change is called. After that, paddlers will rotate turns in the boat and rest periods.

For the first time, this year's race will include both koa and fiberglass divisions.

Since the first Na Wahine O Ke Kai in 1979, the women's racing times have dropped dramatically. Outrigger won the first race in 1979 in 6:35:14 and the 1981 race in 6:47:11.

Hui Nalu is the only other crew to win the race, finishing first in 1982 and 1983.

"Our girls train hard all year for this event," race director Hannie Anderson said. "They are really outstanding athletes. The race is hard and these gals really want to win."

"The youngest girl to compete in the Molokai race was 14 years old and the oldest paddler was 55. As with many sports, this isn't just for the young. It's the training that counts."

The Na Wahine O Ke Kai was started by a group of five women who wanted to give women a chance to compete in a race that had been traditionally for men.

The women, Anderson, Nani Olds, Carleen Ornelles, Shelly Gilman and Puna Dawson, were among 12 who started planning the first race in 1978, and have continued it.

"We thought you could put the women and canoes in the water in

Molokai and give them trophies at Waikiki. We had to learn about million dollar insurance policies, fund raising, permits, security, finding sponsors and a whole lot more. It wasn't nearly as easy as we thought it would be," Anderson added.

"Now we spend about nine months out of the year working on the race. We sell sausage, sweetbread and T-shirts to help finance it and we're very fortunate that the Aloha Week Committee contributes \$6,000 to support our \$15,000 budget."

All of the paddlers, some 252 determined women, will meet at the Sheraton Molokai on Saturday night for a carbo loading party, and then be up before dawn for breakfast and the ride to Hale-O-Lono Harbor.

As the crews paddle out to the starting line this year, each boat will throw a lei into the water in memory of the late Lanakila Spencer, a Hui Nalu paddler who had raced in every Molokai race. She died on July 4.

Forty miles away at the finish line at Ft. DeRussy will be the Aloha Week Court, entertainers, and Leinaala Kalama Heine who will chant as the canoes cross the finish line.

Live coverage of the race will

be provided by KCCN radio and the Navy MARS station beginning at 7 a.m. Updates will be provided every 30 minutes during the race.

"Whether they finish first or twenty-first, I know that each one of our paddlers will have that feeling of satisfaction that comes with crossing the channel," Anderson said. "That's one of the best parts of the race for me, seeing that smile that says 'I did it, I crossed the channel!'"

This year's participants in the Na Wahine O Ke Kai Molokai-to-Oahu race are:

Outrigger Canoe Club, Oahu; Waikiki Surf Club, Oahu; Healani Canoe Club, Oahu; Hui Nalu Canoe Club, Oahu; Lanikai Canoe Club, Oahu; Kailua Canoe Club, Oahu; Waikiki Beach Boys, Oahu; Lokahi Canoe Club, Oahu; Kahana Canoe Club, Maui; Hanohano Canoe Club, San Diego; Off Shore Canoe Club, Newport Beach; Lahaina Canoe Club; Maui; Hanalei Canoe Club, Kauai; Ka Moi Canoe Club, Honolulu; Hui Lanakila Canoe Club, Oahu; Kai Opuia Canoe Club, Kona; Koa Kai Canoe Club, Honolulu; Whistlers Canoe Club, Vancouver, B.C.; To Oa O Tera, Tahiti; FFPP, Tahiti; Tahiti, Tahiti.

Canadians in Paddling Challenge

By Jack Wyatt
Special to the Star-Bulletin

If Waikiki beach boy Rabbit Kekai looks a little more haggard than usual, you can blame it on a crew of Canadian women paddlers to whom he's teaching the art of Hawaiian outrigger canoe paddling.

In a cram course off Waikiki this week, Kekai has been trying to keep 11 White Raven (British Columbia) Canoe Club women paddlers on course for Sunday's 21-team Na Wahine O Ke Kai Molokai-Oahu Race. He admits the task hasn't been an easy one.

"Great bunch of ladies and very competitive," Kekai said, "but they have a lot to learn and very little time to learn it in."

JUST TO GRASP proper Hawaiian outrigger paddling techniques in protected waters requires months to years of practice. But to handle a 40-foot, 400-pound outrigger across an often tempestuous Kaiwi Channel between Molokai and Oahu is a challenge that even the most accomplished paddler thinks twice about.

"We're all competitive kayak or canoe (not outrigger) paddlers in Canada," team organizer and stroker Lee-Ann Hodgkinson said, "but none of us had ever been in a Hawaiian outrigger before."

But Hodgkinson noted that if anyone can teach outrigger paddling to kayakers and canoeists, Kekai can. "He's a wonderful coach," she noted.

If Kekai can survive being the only man among 11 women for more than a week then he's lived up to the proper Waikiki beach boy tradition. "Rabbit may never be the same again," Hodgkinson added.

If strength and conditioning alone could win the seventh annual Na Wahine O Ke Kai, then the Canadians would be rated tops. "Our kayak paddlers have raced all summer in Europe and in Canada," Hodgkinson said, "and our canoeists have just finished their national circuit. Fitness-wise we're ready."

Unfortunately for the visitors, there's more to cross-channel paddling and wave riding than just bulging muscles. "We have waves," said steersman Ruth Madsen of Vancouver Island, "but nothing like you have here."

Defending champ and current record-holder Outrigger Canoe Club is heavily favored to win its fourth Na Wahine O Ke Kai in six tries. Outrigger's women have trained hard for this race and they're out to win, OCC's Marilyn Kali noted.



CANADIAN CLUB—Members of the White Raven Canoe Club of British Columbia are, front to back: Kathy Gallagher, Lee-Ann Hodgkinson, Sheila Taylor, Joanne Draganiuk, Kathy Nixon and Ruth Madsen.—Star-Bulletin Photo by Craig Kojima.

OCC'S WOMEN SET the course record last year when they turned the 40.8 miles in six hours, 12 minutes and 11 seconds. The race begins at Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor at 7 a.m. and ends at Waikiki's Fort DeRussy Beach. The first-finisher is expected after 1 p.m.

Kekai, with an assist from skipper Madsen, has the demand-

ing task of blending five kayak sprinters with six endurance canoe paddlers and coming up with an acceptable stroke.

"A kayaker's race takes about six minutes," Madsen noted, "while our canoe events average two hours, or more. That makes for quite a problem, doesn't it?" Fast crew changes must also be learned.

To make the task even more

challenging, the Canadians, as a team, have never practiced together before this week. "First time some of us met was at the airport coming here," Madsen said. In Canada, kayakers and canoe paddlers compete in different waters.

While Outrigger, and other local crews, pray for moderate to big surfing seas, the Canadians hope for small waves.

Women Vie in Grueling Canoe Race

By Cindy Luis
Star-Bulletin Writer

Whether talking about her first crossing or her sixth coming up this Sunday, Outrigger Canoe Club's Mary Franco has only one word to describe Na Wahine O Ke Kai.

"Challenge," she says of the 40-mile Molokai-to-Oahu women's canoe race.

Franco is one of perhaps 30 paddlers who have traversed the Kaiwi Channel between the two islands every year since the race's inception in 1979. (The race was canceled due to high seas in 1980).

At 17, the challenge was "just to finish," she said of the 1979 race when she paddled with Hui Nalu. "We all were in awe of the channel. It was the first time and you weren't sure if you'd make it."

"BUT THE MORE you get used to it, the easier it seems. Back then it seemed harder, took longer."

In 1981, her challenge was to do better than the fourth-place finish of 79; she and her OCC teammates won the race. While rival Hui Nalu beat OCC the next two years, Franco had expanded her goals—to win the race again, this time as a steersman. She did last September.

"I had been paddling for about five years, mostly stroking (sitting in the first seat)," she said. "I decided I needed something new to keep me interested in the sport. As a steersman, you learn so much more about the ocean. I've learned so much but there's still so much to learn."

As Franco has grown with the sport, so has the race itself. Says annual race director Hannie Anderson: "Each year the race changes, we learn things to make it better. But we've never changed in our thinking that this is the girls' race and we want to let them get as much out of it as they can."

ANDERSON IS ONE of a dozen women whose dedication means a year-round fund-raising effort. "Aloha Week gives us \$6,000 but the race costs about \$15,000," she said. "We make up the rest with the usual—selling T-shirts, Portuguese sausage, sweetbread. It gets harder each year because everyone asks everybody for money. We need some corporate sponsorship but haven't found it yet."

Twenty-one crews, the largest field ever, have entered the race, which begins at 7 a.m. at Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor. It's also the largest non-Hawaii field, with three Tahitian crews, two from California and one from Canada.

"I'm thrilled that it's growing like this internationally," said Anderson. "The more teams the better."

Defending champion OCC is favored to win its second straight title, fourth overall. Only Outrigger and Hui Nalu, with two titles, have ever won this race.

OCC's Traci Philips, a member of last year's champs, was also on the first crew that won in '79. "Each year is different," she said. "I'll remember the '84 crew because we were so strong. But I'll always remember the first time, being the first winners ever."

The first crew is expected to finish at Fort DeRussy Beach around 1 p.m. Last year's winning time of six hours, 12 minutes, 11 seconds is the course record.

The race is dedicated to the late Lanakila Spencer, a member of Hui Nalu's winning crews of 1982 and '83. She died last year.