

Na Wahine O Ke Kai pits women against tough Kaiwi Channel

Kai Opua Canoe Club of Kailua-Kona is one of 21 women's crews from Hawaii, California, Canada and Tahiti competing in the seventh annual Na Wahine O Ke Kai outrigger canoe race from Moloka'i to Waikiki Beach, on Sunday, Sept. 29, as the finale of the O'ahu Aloha Week celebration.

Defending champion Outrigger Canoe Club hopes to better its record setting win of six hours, 12 minutes and 11 seconds, of last year.

The race is scheduled to begin at 7 a.m. at Hale-O-Lono Harbor near Laau Point 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 O'ahu.

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.

Each canoe will be accompanied by an escort or auxiliary boat that will carry

Moloka'i Ho'e October 16

The 34th annual Moloka'i Ho'e, the men's version of the Wahine O Ke Kai, begins at 7:30 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 13 beginning at Hale-O-Lono Harbor on Moloka'i.

The finish line is at Fort DeRussy Beach at Waikiki on O'ahu. World-class teams from all over the Pacific and Germany are expected to compete. The Outrigger Canoe Club, the defending champions, winners of six of the last 10 crossings and 10 Moloka'i Ho'e altogether, are the defending champions.

the resting paddlers, the coach, a race official and the driver, director Hannie Anderson said.

The members of the Kai Opua crew are Tami Warren, Tammy Sullivan, Debbie Kanuha, Linda O'Dell, Lynne Smith, Jay Bates Pocho Youderian, Jeanette DeRoo, Rose Murray, Brooke Wakefield, Jackie Letterman and Doris Favia.

For the first time, this year's race will have both a koa and fiberglass division.

Since the first race in 1979, the women's racing times have dropped dramatically. Outrigger won the first race in 1979 in six hours, 35 minutes and 14 seconds and the 1981 race in 6:47:11. Last year, their record setting time was 6:12:11.

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," Anderson said. "They are really outstanding athletes. The race is hard and these girls really want to win."

"The youngest girl to compete in the Moloka'i 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 See CANOE: Page 18

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Three women's crews from Tahiti will race in the 'Na Wahine O Ke Kai' between Molokai and Oahu this weekend, bringing their own style of paddling and preparation.—Star-Bulletin photos by Mike Tsukamoto



Paddling the Calm Tahitian Way

By Susan Manuel
Star-Bulletin Writer

THE seas between Molokai and Oahu this week are a Tahitian woman's dream—calm and glassy like the lagoons they paddle in at home.

"Bonjour. Bonjour. Bonjour. Bonjour." They greet strangers with straight faces and formal handshakes. Later, at dinner, on the eve of the 40-mile channel race when the all-around rock band gets going, they'll take to the stage, shimmying and yelling and singing, the American paddlers watching in subdued awe.

This year, the seventh running of Na Wahine O Ke Kai across the Kaiwi Channel, three crews from Tahiti will race in the 21-boat, all-female field. Eight of the women have been here before, part of last year's unfortunate crew that hulled, or flipped over, four hours into the race, their koa canoe breaking up against an escort boat.

The women of Federation Francaise Pirogue Polynesienne, or FFPP (pirogue is the canoe), arrived in Molokai Wednesday in matching FFPP red-and-white flowered skirts and jackets. Wasted and waiting to change planes in Honolulu, some slept in plastic chairs, others played guitars and ukuleles and sang.

"This is a race very good for us because of the calm," said Dolly Teritahi, a French and Polynesian-looking

woman with close-cropped, burnt-sienna hair and giant swirls of red and white earrings. "We have not the big waves to surf with the canoe."

The Tahitian women's stroke appears to be made for glassy water, and steerswomen have no training in riding choppy water. The stroke falls somewhere between the Tahitian men's straight backs and rapid, ramrod whips with large, straight paddles; and the Hawaiian slow lean into the boat, pulling long yards of water.

The Tahitian women keep their torsos still, spines straight, as they do when dancing. But their arms and shoulders move in a continuous circle, showing off hillocks of muscles as the boat glides gracefully through the water.

The women are teachers, nurses, secretaries, waitresses—somewhere between 17 and 33, they say.

The other clubs, Comite Polynesienne Pirogue, or CPP, and Teoatera, also belong to FFPP, an organization equivalent to the Hawaii Canoe Racing Association, with members from all over French Polynesia. The 36 women have little experience racing together, since they were selected from several clubs to make up the three long-distance crews.

Emile Vernaudom, president of FFPP and mayor of Mahina, one of Tahiti's 12 counties, is accompanying the women. A thin, elegant man,

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he repeats the Tahitian line that no one knows which of the crews will win.

"Dimanche (Sunday), we'll see who's best." One of the coaches, Pelizer Ferdinand described his method of training.

"They won't be with their husbands for six months." They also practice four hours a day and eight on Saturdays, he said.

Some of the women disputed the claim—one hour every other day was more like it. They paddle 88 kilometers on Saturdays to make up for lost time and the fact that most of their races are under 3.5 kilometers.

The women of FFPP will paddle the Big Island koa canoe Maehaa, cared for by Tahitian transplant Pierre Kimitete and built by FFPP coach Jacques Wong and his son, Afa. Kimitete favors the Maehaa if the water is rough, glass canoes if it's smooth. At least one of the crews will place in the top five, he predicts. (Outrigger Club's crew is favored to win.)

Kimitete, who is hosting FFPP here, talks about the prowess of his boat, which took several races at the Hawaii state championships this year as he would a crew of paddlers.

"To me, you're proud to be on koa," he said, watching the crews depart yesterday morning from the Kaunakakai pier. "If the Hawaiian people don't push to keep the koa, they're going to lose it."

The women run along the pier in bare feet. Paddling outfits are teeny bikini tops and shorts rolled down off the hips to resemble bikini bottoms.

For the first time, one crew has abandoned the traditional straight, large Tahitian paddle for a slightly bent blade with a T-top. But they still grip the shaft of the blade, instead of cupping the T.

Canoe paddling is a big sport in Tahiti, not so much a mode of transportation between islands any more, but an activity that's generated more than 80 clubs.

Their boats are narrower and lighter than Hawaiian canoes, and the Tahitian women brought their own ama (outriggers) to attach to the borrowed Hawaiian canoes. But Kimitete put thumbs down, blaming last year's disaster on the thin Tahitian version and insisting on a fat Hawaiian ama to keep the boat steady in rough water.

"This year," he grinned, "they go on my style."

Outrigger tops fleet in rough seas

HONOLULU (UPI) — The Outrigger Canoe Club women paddlers outpaced 20 other women crews to win the grueling seventh annual Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race Sunday.

The defending champions made the 40.8 mile crossing in 6 hours, 50 minutes, 31 seconds. The winning time was the slowest in the races seven-year history. Outrigger paddlers said conditions in the Kaiwi Channel were very rough and windy.

The Offshore team from Newport Beach, California, came in second in 7 hours, 1 minute, and 3 seconds. The first Maui club to finish was Lahaina Canoe Club, who finished third, with a winning time of 7:03:23.

Lahaina's crew consisted of Cathy Longstaff, Marge Messner, Elaine Hart, Mary Yates, Vanessa Lerry, Tony Kahan, Jackie Burke, Laura Blears-Cody, Carol Arreola, Candy Horton, Ann Perry, and Vicki Nesdol.

Kahana Canoe Club finished in fifteenth place, with a time of 7:46:45. Kahana's crew consisted of Linda Lowe, Cassy Pell, Ann Blanchard, Lorri Habens, Jazelle Calamba, Tito Nuesca, Linda Keller, Jeane Gonzales, Pam Navis, Kelly Zimmerman, Penny Tupolopo, and Lina Celetti.

Top 10 finishers — 1. Outrigger Canoe Club (Oahu) 6:50:31; 2. Offshore (Calif.) 7:02:03; 3. Lahaina (Maui) 7:03:22; 4. Kauai-Molokai 7:11:04; 5. Whistlers (Canada) 7:14:22; 6. Maire Nui (Tahiti) 7:16:07; 7. Kailua (Oahu) 7:16:27; 8. Hui Nalu (Oahu) (first to finish in koa) 7:24:16; 9. Hanohano (Calif.) 7:28:51.

Paddling Na Wahine O Ke Kai

Molokai to Oahu
Overall — 1. Outrigger Canoe Club (Oahu) 6:50:31; 2. Offshore (Calif.) 7:02:03; 3. Lahaina (Maui) 7:03:22; 4. Kauai-Molokai 7:11:04; 5. Whistlers (Canada) 7:14:22; 6. Maire Nui (Tahiti) 7:16:07; 7. Kailua (Oahu) 7:16:27; 8. Hui Nalu (Oahu) (first to finish in koa) 7:24:16; 9. Hanohano (Calif.) 7:28:51; 10. FFPP (Tahiti) 7:32:27 (second koa); 11. Kai Opua (Hawaii) 7:34:10; 12. Ka Mo'i 7:34:14; 13. Hui Lanakila 7:40:09 (3rd koa); 14. Koa Kai 7:40:54; 15. Kahana 7:46:45; 16. Waikiki Surf 7:58:28; 17. O'ahu 8:05:05; 18. Waikiki Beach Boys 8:05:59; 19. Ta Oa O Tera (Tahiti) 8:07:00; 20. Heavani-Kai Oni Paa combined 8:08:31.

OCC wins Molokai-to-Oahu race

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The Offshore team from Newport Beach, California, came in second in 7 hours, 1 minute, and 3 seconds. Lahaina was third in 7:03:23 followed by Hanalei in a time of 7:11:04.

The Na Wahine O Ke Kai race started at Hale O Lono Harbor on Molokai's southwest shore and wound up at Fort Derussy Beach. Taking part were teams from Tahiti, California, and Vancouver, British Columbia, as well as Hawaii.