

JUN. - 6 1969



A relieved Mrs. Hemmings greets son, Aka, after the Channel crossing.

One Paddle, Two Paddle Across Molokai Channel

By BOB KRAUSS
Advertiser Columnist

Aka Hemmings, 17, and his surfing buddy, Tommy Holmes, 23, took a little paddle across the Molokai Channel yesterday. Aka is a junior at Punahou; Tommy is a graduate student at the University of Hawaii.

They set out from Molokai at 5:30 a.m. on a couple of stock racing boards and they waded ashore on the upper end of Sandy Beach at about 4 p.m.

The boys made the 26-mile open ocean crossing without an escort boat because that's how the old Hawaiians did it.

They were equipped with six candy bars, some liquid energy food and a half gallon of water in a plastic mayonnaise jar scrounged from the

A Bob Krauss SPECIAL

Outrigger Canoe Club kitchen.

Upon their arrival they were a bit waterlogged and in excellent spirits, but about five hours late due to some strong currents along the way.

As a result, the Coast Guard had a helicopter, a fixed wing aircraft, a cutter and a Civil Air Patrol plane up looking for them.

This annoyed Aka somewhat. "Who sent those rescue guys?" he wanted to know. "It was really no sweat."

Mrs. Fred Hemmings Sr.,

Aka's mother, said the Huckleberry Finn adventure was almost a year in the making. She admitted she wasn't very enthusiastic about the idea.

She explained: "But Aka said, 'What if Christopher Columbus' mother wouldn't let him go because he'd fall off the end of the world?'"

"I'd rather have him paddling the Molokai Channel than smoking pot."

To warm up for the Molokai paddle, the boys took a trip on their surfboards over Easter vacation down the Napali Coast of Kauai.

"They wanted to visit Kalalau Valley," said Aka's father, Big Fred. "To show you

See KRAUSS on A-16, Col. 7

26 Miles of Sea On Surfboard

From Page 1

what water rats they are, they decided not to take the trail into the valley because it's slippery and dangerous. They paddled their surfboards, instead."

The boys paddled about 10 miles from the end of the road of Hanalei to Kalalau Valley, cooking utensils wrapped in plastic loaded on their boards. They stayed a couple of days, then paddled another 15 miles on down the coast to Barking Sands where the road starts again.

It is believed to be the first time anyone has paddled the length of the uninhabited Napali Coast on surfboards.

"Aka did a lot of research for the Molokai paddle," said Mrs. Hemmings. "He made trips to the library."

The boys also got advice from Aka's big brother, Little Fred, world champion surfer and a veteran paddler in the Molokai to Oahu outrigger canoe race.

Mrs. Hemmings went to a garden shop and bought a plastic tube to fit into the top of the mayonnaise jar so the boys could sip water from the tube. A clamp from Long's Drug Store stopped the tube when not in use.

"We wanted them to take an escort boat, but they said the old Hawaiians didn't do it that way," said Big Fred. "In fact, we talked them out of going two weekends ago because they didn't have a boat."

The aim of the boys was to break the 6-hour record for paddling the Molokai Channel, set by Tommy Zahn in the 1950s.

Mike Givens, vice president of the Molokai Hotel, said the boys were his guests for two days before making their paddle and that they were the hit of Molokai, especially among the Hawaiians who were impressed because the paddlers were not taking a guide boat.

"They had a good night's sleep and peanut butter sandwiches in the morning," said Givens. "Aka Hodgins, cattle superintendent for the Molokai Ranch, plotted the course for them, about the same that the canoes take."

Givens said the boys set out at exactly 5:30 a.m. under perfect conditions.

"The water was so

smooth," he said. "They said, 'We'll see you,' and paddled off. But when I took the 10:15 a.m. Hawaiian Airlines flight the pilot followed their exact course and we couldn't spot them."

To break the record, the boys would have had to land on Sandy Beach before 11:30 a.m. Noon passed and they hadn't been sighted.

By 2 p.m. the elder Hemmings were beginning to worry.

"I'll bet they had to turn around and go back," said Big Fred.

"What about sharks?" said Mrs. Hemmings.

(The parents of Tommy, Dr. and Mrs. William John Holmes, are away from the Islands on vacation.)

Big Fred had promised his son that he'd wait until 3 p.m. before starting to worry. At 3 p.m. Big Fred called the Coast Guard. He learned that a search was already under way.

The family sat around a table at the Outrigger Canoe Club exchanging theories. Big Fred insisted the boys had turned back. An older sister decided a current had taken them around to Chinaman's Hat. Mrs. Hemmings went to call Molokai again.

At nearly 3:30 p.m. she came running back, "They've just been sighted a mile off Makapuu!"

There was a mad dash for autos and a hectic drive through traffic to Sandy Beach where the boys were standing nonchalantly, as if you paddle the Molokai Channel every day.

"It wasn't too rough, no sharks," said Tommy. "We really got hungry, though. We could have eaten a dozen more candy bars."

Will he do it again? "I think I'll pass for a while," he said. "It's really hard."

For Aka, it apparently took more courage to talk to a reporter than it did to paddle the Molokai Channel.

"I don't want to make excuses," he said. "But I think we must have had a really bad current."

Mrs. Hemmings didn't waste time in such technical palaver. After bussing each young man soundly on the cheek, she opened a half gallon of orange drink and a can of sliced peaches, and fed them.



Mrs. Hemmings' face shows anxiety of waiting.



Advertiser Photos by Leland Cheong

Surfer Tom Holmes gulps juice after paddle.

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HONOLULU STAR-BULLETIN
JUN 7 1969

Surf adviser

Fred Hemmings, a Makaha and World Surfing meet champion, leaves Monday afternoon for Arizona where he will act as technical and promotional adviser for a \$2 million "Big Surf" project.

The venture involves man-made waves projected to heights of six feet by a machine.

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WAIKIKI BEACH PRESS
JUN. 9 1969

Outriggers Race In Honor of King

One of the most colorful local events celebrating Kamehameha Day is the annual Kam Day Canoe Regatta.

It will be run Sunday, June 15, starting at 10 a.m. at Kailua Beach Park on the Windward side of Oahu.

The canoe race is under the joint sponsorship of the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association and the Kamehameha Day Celebration Commission.

This year there will be 13 events, four for women and nine for men.

Clubs entered are the Kailua Hawaiian Civic Club, Lanikai Canoe Club, Kaoni, Leeward Kai, Maile Sons, Waikiki Surf Club, Outrigger Canoe Club, Hui Nalu, Healan and Order of Kamehameha.

Highlight of the day will be the three-mile senior men's race, which is the last event.

There will be junior, novice, freshman and senior events. Awards will be presented to the winners following each race at the judges' stand.

Visitors are welcome free to bring their lunch and sit on the beach. There are numerous spectacular vantage points along the beach for those who wish to take pictures of the thrilling races.

The event is dedicated to King Kamehameha and has been run since World War II.

Charles Kauhane is president of the HCRA and Walter Rodenhurst Jr. is race chairman this year.

A schedule of upcoming canoe races follows: Sunday, June 22--Lee-ward - Waianae Regatta, Pokai Bay; Friday, July 4 -- Walter F. McFarlane Regatta, Waikiki Beach.

Sunday, July 13--Oahu Championship Regatta, Keahi Lagoon; Saturday,

August 2--State Championship Regatta, Kaneohe Marine Air Station; Lanikai Invitational (date to be determined); Sunday, October 19--Molokai-Oahu Outrigger Canoe Race.