

Shocking: British crew in outrigger

By Jack Wyatt

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English rowers were probably shocked when a Hawaiian outrigger canoe, paddled by six Londoners, sped along the River Thames, past Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, under Westminster Bridge and toward the Tower of London.

The Thames were rowers waters, reserved for sleek lightweight shells. This was tea and crumpet country, not paddling waters for an oversized Polynesian canoe with a funny outrigger hanging to one side to keep it from tipping over.

"We created quite a stir among our traditional rowers. At first they didn't know what to think," Londoner Graham Goldsmith recalled.

Goldsmith leads a crew of Brits representing the Royal Canoe Club of England in Sunday's Molokai Ho'e—the men's Molokai to Oahu outrigger canoe race.

"Our training wasn't all on the Thames. Our serious practice was held in the English Channel so we could try the big waves," Goldsmith said yesterday at Waikiki before leaving for the Friendly Island.

A record 60, nine-paddler crews, including 41 from Hawaii, have entered Sunday's 37th cross-channel race. The 40.8-mile contest begins at Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor at 7:30 a.m. The race ends at Waikiki's Ft. DeRussy Beach five to six hours later. Two time defending champ Outrigger Canoe Club is heavily favored to win its third consecutive race.

"Last year was our practice," Goldsmith said, explaining that his "English" crew included four Californians.

"This time only Jody D'Enbeau, our steersman, is non-English. He's Hawaiian and knows your waters well," Goldsmith said. To keep D'Enbeau legal the visitors made him an honorary Royal Canoe Club member. Goldsmith hopes to better last year's 37th place among 49 finishers.

The Molokai Ho'e is known world-wide among paddlers as the ultimate of ocean canoe racing. Unfortunately for visitors, the Hawaiian canoe is pretty scarce once past the Islands.

"We were told that your Toots Minvielle shipped a Hawaiian outrigger to England some years ago to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Capt. Cook's discovery of Hawaii. We quickly began our search," Goldsmith said.

Minvielle, 17 Hawaii paddlers, and a 40-foot outrigger departed for England in 1978. "Our plans were to paddle the canoe from France to England, our way of demonstrating the Hawaiian outrigger and how well it handled rugged channels," Minvielle said. The trip went well. Later, Minvielle donated the boat to the Capt. Cook Museum at Middlesbrough, England.

Recalled Goldsmith, "We found the canoe but the museum's curator wouldn't let us take it." After much deliberation the English paddlers were given permission take a fiberglass mold from its hull so they could build a canoe of their own.

"That's been our one and only practice boat and we've grown to love it," he said.

Royal Canoe Club's made-in-England Hawaiian canoe is the only working Polynesian outrigger east of New York City. "It's a pretty unique vessel especially when seen paddling on the Thames among all those sleek rowing shells," Goldsmith said.

The prospect of Hawaiian outrigger racing becoming an Olympic sport is very slight, say the Brits. "It would be an awful slow process, 12 years away at the earliest. And that would come only after a huge promotional effort by a lot of people," Royal Canoe's Jon Goodwin said.

Goodwin, an Olympic canoe paddler in 1972, explained that because the outrigger is virtually unknown in Europe, and because Eastern Bloc countries control much of the Olympic sport selection, the chances of outrigger racing making the Games is dim.

"One option," Goodwin explained, "is that Olympic officials usually grant the hosting nation a sport of their choice. Perhaps Hawaii should bid for the Games."

Jolly good crew

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Courtesy Royal Canoe Club
Members of Britain's Royal Canoe Club pose with their outrigger in Calais, France, on the English Channel, where they trained for Sunday's Molokai Ho'e. Story on Page D-3.