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Arkansans prepare for Molokai Hoe

BY JOHN STOKES
Democrat Staff Writer

About a year and a half ago, Stephen Lynn of Maumelle got the idea of putting together a team of Arkansans to compete in the 1987 Molokai Hoe Outrigger Canoe Race, a 41-mile, open-ocean race between the Hawaiian Islands of Molokai and Oahu.

On the surface this idea may seem a little crazy. There are no oceans in Arkansas, no team from Arkansas has ever competed in the race and it is probably not one person in the state who has ever competed in an outrigger canoe.

Never mind all that, said Jim Van Patter, the coach of Lynn's 12-man team.

"Steve saw this (the Molokai Hoe), as I did, on (ABC's) World of Sports and (the competitors in that race) didn't paddle any better than we do," said Van Patter, a former advisor for Explorer Post 8 in Little Rock who got several of the team's members started in canoeing.

The members of the team are Lynn, Rodney Bailey of Benton, Jack Blakley of Maumelle, Dale Burris of Russellville, Bill Cains of Fort Smith, Bill Sowell of North Little Rock, Donnie Van Patter of Little Rock, Mark Wilbur of Mountain Home, Perry Wilbur of Little Rock, Rocky Caldwell of Gamaliel, Robert Jacuzzi of Alexander and Pat McCutcheon of Little Rock.

"The majority of the people on the team have probably been paddling for 14 years or more," said Lynn. "They have a lot of experience." But, he admitted, "none have ever paddled in the ocean."

The first thing the team had to do was get a boat. They pooled their money for a down payment, then took out a loan and the boat, which retails for \$6,500, was finally delivered early last week.

On Saturday, the team,



AN ARKIE TEAM — Members of the Arkansas Outrigger Canoe Team pose Sunday with their recently purchased canoe on the Arkansas River. On the dock (from left to right): Coach Jim Van Patter, Bill

Cains, Rocky Caldwell and Mark Wilbur. In the canoe (from front to back): Robert Jacuzzi, Perry Wilbur, Andy Jacuzzi, Steve Lynn, Billy Sowell and Dale Burris.

Arkansas Democrat/Kim Fowler

which is sponsored by the *Arkansas Democrat*, held its first official workout at the Coast Guard station on River Mountain Drive near the Interstate 430 bridge.

Nine of the team's 12 members were on hand to try out the boat, which is 43 feet, four inches long, has a width of 17½ inches, a depth of 19½ inches and weighs 400 pounds. A 15-foot "outrigger" provides the balance so that the canoe can navigate through the eight- to 12-foot swells that are common to the race across the Kaiwi Channel.

The boat is painted white and trimmed in bright red.

"We're probably going to have 12 scheduled practices (on the Arkansas River between

Murray and Terry Lock and Dams) between now and October (the race is scheduled for October 10) and a lot of informal workouts in between," said Lynn. "We all race anyway, we've got a racing circuit in the state, and we all train on our own. So we'll get a lot of training time in besides just in this boat."

The Molokai Hoe was first held in 1952 and over the years has been ruled by native Hawaiians and Tahitians. But in 1985 the Illinois Brigade, a team of national-class racers from the Midwest, pulled off a stunning victory.

"We learned one thing from watching the race of two years ago (on film) and that's the team that's in the best shape

wins," Lynn said. "The team from Illinois won two years ago in pretty rough conditions and they just showed that if you're in good shape you can win the race."

But Lynn said the team's goal in its first attempt at the race is modest.

"Our goal is to break the top 20 the first time," Lynn said. "But that'll be hard to do. Seventy-five percent of the racers are from the Hawaiian Islands."

Jim Van Patter was optimistic about the team's chances. "There are so many top competitive paddlers on the team," he said, "that we feel we can be competitive if we don't beat ourselves."