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CANOE _ PADDLING

Ka'ahumanu wants to rule Molokai

**The Keoua Honaunau Canoe Club
rebuilt its canoe for tomorrow's
Molokai Hoe after finding pieces
of her in the waters off Kauai**

By Cindy Luis
Star-Bulletin



The Queen is whole again.

And so is the Keoua Honaunau Canoe Club.

Their 45-foot canoe, Ka'ahumanu, will spend tonight under the lone kiawe tree at Hale O Lono, resting up for tomorrow's 48th Bankoh Hinano Molokai Hoe men's outrigger canoe race. What a story the koa canoe has to tell since she last tried to finish this event three years ago.

It's a story of fantasy and fantastic coincidence. One of what some would call luck and others would call fate.

The Ka'ahumanu, named for the favorite wife of Kamehameha I, was making her Kaiwi

Channel debut in the 41-mile race from Molokai to Oahu. Several hours into the race, with Keoua running in the top 30 in the record field of 102 canoes, something went terribly wrong in the rough, eight-foot seas.

A rogue wave caught the Ka'ahumanu broadside, burying the ama (float) under the water and flipping the canoe. The rigging broke and the ama came off. The only way to save her from going down was to tie a rope around the hull and have an officials' boat tow her to shore.

The Ka'ahumanu came limping in, with a third of the canoe missing -- seats 5 and 6 and the back manu.

"I was steering when we went over," Kurtis Yamauchi said in a phone call from the Big Island earlier this week. "When we left her, she was whole. When we next saw her, a third of her was gone. It was kind of a shock."

It was decided to rebuild the canoe, which had originally been made from two koa logs. Yamauchi said it was unintentional but one log was red koa, the other yellow. They are the colors of ali'i, Hawaiian royalty, as well as the colors of Keoua Honaunau.

Yamauchi, a woodworker but not a canoe builder, began the daunting task. A few months into the project, Yamauchi said he - and the canoe - came to an impasse.

"The pieces for the back part wouldn't stay glued," said Yamauchi. "They'd fall off. I didn't know what to do. We were stuck."

It was as if the canoe was waiting for the impossible. And it happened.

There came a call from Kauai in February 1997. Four months and over 100 miles later, members of Kaiola Canoe Club had found the missing piece of Ka'ahumanu.

In a chicken-skin tale straight out of the Twilight Zone, a Kaiola crew had been paddling off Nawiliwili when the rigging broke, as had happened with Keoua.

According to an account in Island Paddler magazine, one of the Kaiola paddlers jumped into the water to fix the rigging when "he saw something coming up from the depths. The piece of Ka'ahumanu came gurgling up to greet him."

"We had always believed it would be found," said Jack Kelly, president of Keoua Honaunau. "We had various club members who had spent many weekends flying to Oahu and scouring the coast for signs of her."

"It was pretty chicken skin when it was found," said Yamauchi. "We weren't sure it was the piece until we actually saw it. It was pretty torn apart, with wormholes and barnacles."

"But we were able to salvage most of it. And where those new pieces wouldn't stay glued, the old ones haven't fallen off once."

Club members would come down to see how the work was progressing and "it was like visiting a sick friend in a hospital," said Kelly.

Thanks to donations from other clubs and Keoua Honaunau's fund-raiser to help rebuild the canoe, the *Ka'ahumanu* was healed. It took Yamauchi about a year to get her back into racing form; she won several long distance races this season.

Tomorrow, it's time for some unfinished business.

"I hope there's waves again because she does great in waves," said Yamauchi. "She's a lot like the queen (who was said to be a great wave rider.) She is graceful but with a lot of volume to her."

Molokai Hoe

- ▶ **When:** Tomorrow. 7:30 a.m. start, Hale O Lono, Molokai. First finishers expected around 1 p.m., Fort DeRussy Beach.
- ▶ **Who:** A record 103 canoes entered from Hawaii, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Tahiti, Canada and the U.S. mainland paddling 41 miles.
- ▶ **Defending champion:** Outrigger Canoe Club (Oahu), 5:16:02.
- ▶ **Record:** Lanikai Canoe Club (Oahu), 4:53:03, 1995.
- ▶ **Radio/TV:** Updates throughout the race, KCCN, 1420-AM and 100.3 FM; KHON, 1 p.m.