

The Malia in B.C.

Since ancient times, Hawaiian outriggers were hewn from logs, predominantly Koa logs found only in Hawaii. The Malia hull, “considered by many today to represent the prototype of the modern Hawaiian racing canoe,”¹ was made of Koa wood in Kona, Hawaii in 1934 by James Yamazaki.²

For years the Molokai-Oahu race was the only long-distance canoe race anywhere. In September, 1959, a second race was introduced in California, again by the irrepressible canoeist Albert Edward (Toots) Minvielle³ who, years earlier, had founded the Molokai race. In 1959, two Koa outriggers were shipped to North America for the first Catalina Channel Crossing: one hull named, “Malia” (*calm waters*) and the other named, “Niuhe” (*shark*). There were only two official entries in that first Catalina race, and “Malia,” manned by an all-star Hawaiian crew, won the crossing in a time of 5 hours, just eleven minutes ahead of a relatively in-experienced Californian team in the “Niuhe.”

But fiberglass technology was developing in the late 1950's and

“an interesting sidelight of the first Catalina-to-Newport race in 1959 was the alleged pirating of a fiberglass plug for the malia. This shell, reportedly taken without authorization while she awaited shipment back to Hawaii was later made into a mold. From this mold, and hulls of canoes that came from it, other molds were made. .. thus the Malia inadvertently sired a noble fleet of fiberglass-and-resin canoes.”⁴

The 1960 Catalina Channel Crossing Race hosted five, fiberglass Malia's and the following year there were 8. The first mold, since it had been taken from a hand-crafted Koa hull, had some inconsistencies on its surface so better molds were manufactured as the number of Californian clubs grew and built their fleets of malias.

¹Holmes, Tommy, The Hawaiian Canoe, (2nd edition),. Editions Ltd, P.O Box 10558 Honolulu, Hawaii, 1981/93/96, p.124.

² The Hawaiian Canoe p. 128

³ The Hawaiian Canoe p.145.

⁴ The Hawaiian Canoe, p.146

“After almost 40 years of unquestioning reproduction of the malia-type Kona canoe, local Hawaiian canoeists began experimenting with some new designs.”⁵ In the 1970’s, faster and more versatile OC6 designs were coming into vogue with the introduction of the Hawaiian Class Racer followed by the Bradley and the Force Five. The malia, although still raced at special events, was surpassed by faster hulls.

Twenty-seven years after outriggers arrived on California’s shores, Vancouver hosted Expo ‘86 and the Lotus Sports Club was formed to prepare a team for the first Vancouver International Dragon Boat Festival. The Lotus Sports Club and the False Creek Racing Canoe Club (FCRCC) were composed of athletes from various backgrounds who quickly became fierce, yet friendly, competitors. The two clubs and this competitive spirit would foster outrigger racing in Canada.

David Boulding, then an executive member of FCRCC, raced the Catalina Channel Crossing and talked with a senior member of a California club that still had a malia mold. David was told that he could have the mold for free if he came down to California to pick it up. The mold had been stored, unused, for years in a backyard in California. David asked Mike Neckar of Necky Kayaks, who shipped high-end kayaks to California, to trailer the mold up to Canada on his empty trailer on his return trip. Neckar agreed but, for legal reasons, left the trailer on the U.S. side of the border. David drove to the border and, after some discussions with U.S. customs, imported the mold to B.C.

After Expo ‘86, David informed Jim Mancell of the Lotus Sports Club and Steve Schleicher of Nimbus Kayaks of this mold. Members of the Lotus Sports Club, with the help of Steve Schleicher, proceeded to make two malia outriggers from this original mold. These first two Canadian malias are still in excellent condition and they are occasionally used and raced out of The Lotus Sports Club. FCRCC also manufactured malias from this mold and, between the two clubs, outrigger racing began in Canada.

⁵ The Hawaiian Canoe, p.132

The Malia mold was stored by Calmar Fiberglass throughout the 1990's until December of 2006 when Calmar, needing more space, asked for someone to pick it up from their site. Mike Billy, of the North Shore Canoe Club, brought this to the attention of the Canadian Outrigger Racing Association (CORA). Steve Palmier, from FCRCC, suggested that the mold should, if possible, be preserved for its historical value. CORA and the Lotus Sports Club agreed the mold would be stored at the Lotus clubhouse.

One boat from Hawaii inadvertently gave birth to outrigger canoe racing in North America. The malia mold is an integral part of Canadian and North American paddling history. Without the malia mold, outrigger racing in Canada may never have taken hold as early as it did. From a single hull, there are now enough outrigger canoes to support more than 50 outrigger racing clubs throughout North America. Our Malia mold may, or may not have come from that original plug taken from a Koa OC6 named "Malia," but it is most definitely closely related. There is still a "Malia Class Race" in Southern California and, as recently as 1996, I raced in the malia class at the USA Championships, Catalina Channel Crossing, in a hull named "Fred" (a partner to "Wilma") belonging to the Dana Point Outrigger Canoe Club in California.

Doug Mancell

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