



# CANADIAN OUTRIGGER HALL OF FAME

## Mel (Melanie) Whittall



### Summary

Mel (Melanie) Whittall has been involved in the paddling community for over 25 years. Mel leveraged Hawaiian paddlesports contacts to provide canoes, paddles, and sportswear in the early days of outrigger canoeing in Canada. Mel was able to support the growth of suburban clubs through access to first class equipment. Mel is an established entrepreneur as partner / owner of several Canadian sports and outdoors organizations including Ocean & Outdoors Sales, Pulling Water Canoe Sports, and Open Ocean Outriggers. Mel provided coaching for several outrigger canoe and dragon boat teams. Mel acted as race Director for Gibsons Pulling Water Challenge and Delta Sprints for many years. Mel has volunteered as Timing Official with Nordic Canada events and the 2010 Winter Olympics. Mel founded Delta Outrigger Kanu Association (DOKA) and coached there for 15 years. Mel has board member experience with BC Sports Rep Association, HUB Cycle Coalition, Canadian Outrigger Racing Association, and Filberg Heritage Lodge and Park Association.

### Early Career

Some background on Mel in the 1990s had been shared by herself and Ross Creasy (JOCC Alumni) in 2021 interviews. Mel is descended from Bob and Florence Filberg, and was born in the early 1960s in Comox where she spent her childhood. [01] Bob Filberg built the Filberg Heritage Lodge and bequeathed the property to the Vancouver Foundation. The Filberg family also owned property in a small oceanfront community on the Big Island's Kohala Coast. [02] Mel graduated from University of Western Ontario with a BA in Social Sciences in 1984. Mel returned to Vancouver and graduated from BCIT with a Diploma in Mass Communication and Journalism in 1992. [03] Mel spent several years living / vacationing at the family property in Hawaii where she made local contacts in the paddlesports industry. Mel returned to Vancouver in the late 1990s where she became active in the paddlesports and outdoors industry. Having gone full circle, Mel returned to Comox in 2019 and now volunteers as a Director with the Filberg Heritage Lodge and Park Association (FHLPA). [04]

### Outrigger Canoeing Achievements

Mel has paddled with Kihei Canoe Club, False Creek, Delta Outrigger, and most recently Comox Valley Canoe Racing Club. Mel would race Molokai Na Wahine four times all together. [05] First crossing was with Kihei Canoe Club in 1997 [06] and then again in 1999. [07] Mel would also race with False Creek in 2001 to 6th place Open Fibreglass [08] and once more in 2007. [09] Mel has represented Team Canada at International Va'a Federation (IVF) World Sprints in 1998 and 2004. At 1998 Fiji IVF World Sprints, Mel would race with a Canadian team that would take Bronze in V6 500M Masters & V12 500M Open Women. At 2004 Hilo IVF World Sprints, Mel would race with a FCRC Masters team. [10] In 2006, Shay Bintliff, Adrienne Hegadus, Pam Berkoff, and Mel would take 1st place in Maui-To-Molokai OC2 Masters division (Rick Nu'u coach). [11] Mel led 18 Delta Outrigger paddlers to 2005 Edmonton World Masters Games, [12] taking Bronze and Gold in outrigger canoeing events. [13].

### Coach-Builder Achievements

The Vancouver International Dragon Boat Festival did not have Senior teams or a Senior division until 1998. A group of seniors formed a False Creek Community Center (FCCC) Seniors Dragon Boat Team called the Grandragons with Mel as their coach for several years, intending to participate in the 1998 Alcan Dragon Boat Festival. The Grandragons achieved their goal and were an inspiration to other senior paddlers and the first Seniors Cup Race was held at the 1999 Alcan Dragon Boat Festival. [14] Mel also served as a support coach for several Molokai Hoe crews including Jericho Outrigger Canoe Club in 2003. [15]

Mel was with False Creek Racing Canoe Club for several years before relocating to Ladner, founding Delta Outrigger in 2004 and coached with Delta for 15 years. [16] Walter Point of Autumn Rose Canoe Club from Lummi Nation would play a pivotal role in the quest by Delta Outrigger for their first OC6. [17] Seems that Walter Point's father had a Clipper Advantage named

"Eagle Wind" that he was willing to part with and a deal was negotiated whereby Delta Outrigger would pay for the OC6 over 2 years. Walter Point delivered the OC6 to Deas Slough where it was blessed and whenever the Pulling Together Journey passes [18] through Delta, the "Eagle Wind" is invited to join the procession. Delta hosted OC Sprints Regattas on the Deas Slough, [19] with Mel as Race Director in support of CORA IVF Sprints each year from 2007-2010. [20]

Mel was on the FCRCC Board from 2000-2004 where she advocated for hiring of Rick Nu'u and then Alan Carlsson as Head Coaches, elevating the status of False Creek on the outrigger canoeing world stage. Mel also represented False Creek Racing Canoe Club with CORA for several years. [21] Mel served with CORA several times in the late 1990s, mid 2000s, and early 2010s. Mel served as CORA Education Director from 2004-2007 on the Officiating Committee, Safety Education Committee, and Coaching Education Committee, [22] developing coaching clinics for regional centres. [23]

## **Pioneering Achievements**

Being in Vancouver in 1998 proved fortuitous for Mel. Outrigger canoeing was growing rapidly with new clubs forming across Western Canada, but there was a shortage of OC1s / OC2s, paddles, and high-performance sportswear for the influx of new paddlers. Pulling Water Canoe Sports was formed by Mel with the intent of sport building, [24] and between 1998-2012, [25] imported and sold Tiger Canoes made by March "Tiger" Taylor, [26] Hawaiian Designs Canoes made by John Martin, [27] Kaiwi Challengers made by Brent Bixler and Walter Guild of Canoe Sports, [28] Xcel paddlesports wear, [31] and Kialoa paddles made by Dave / Meg Chun, [32] for the Western Canada paddling community. Pulling Water Canoe Sports would grow to be the third largest account for the very young Kialoa Paddles leading to a lifelong relationship with Dave and Meg.

Gibsons Paddle Club was formed in 1999 and would host the first Howe Sound Outrigger Race that year. Mel would work with the Gibsons Planning / Race Committee in the early years. [33] Pulling Water Canoe Sports sponsored the first Pulling Water Challenge (PWC) Sunday small-boat event after the OC6 races. The PWC became a series in 2000 with a focus on encouraging participation by female paddlers. [34] The PWC was innovative in that there were separate mens and womens races so that the limited number of OC1s could be maximized. By 2004, the PWC Sunday small-boat event had grown to be one of the most well attended small-boat events on the West Coast with over 110 racers by 2004. [35] Pulling Water Canoe Sports would continue to sponsor the Sunday PWC small-boat event with Mel as Race Director each year from 1999-2008. [36]

Open Ocean Outriggers was formed by Ross Creasy and Mel in 2002 with the intent of having an affordable made-in-Canada OC1. [37] Ex-Navy Seal Dee VanWinkle founded San Diego Outrigger Canoe Club and manufactured the Sea Lion OC1 in the early 1980s. [38] Open Ocean Outriggers purchased the mould for the Sea Lion OC1 when it came up for sale in 2002. [39] The Sea Lion mould was shipped to the border where Walter Point imported it into Canada for free by virtue of his First Nations card. Open Ocean Outriggers approached James Van Nostrand of Clipper Canoes and Western Canoeing & Kayaking in 2002 to manufacture a line of single-person outrigger canoes. The first-generation sit-on-top C-Lion OC1s began distribution by Open Ocean Outriggers in 2002. The second-generation open cockpit sit-inside C-Lion ST OC1s ideal for colder water began distribution by Open Ocean Outriggers in 2006. The C-Lion was the OC1 chosen for the 2005 Edmonton World Masters Games and by CORA for the 2009 National Sprints Championships, [40] the 2014 Rio IVF World Sprints Time Trials, and the 2016 Australia IVF World Sprints Time Trials. [41] Western Canoeing & Kayaking was the only manufacturing source during the entire 120+ canoe run. Open Ocean Outriggers would also become the Western Canada dealer for the Huki line of outrigger canoes in 2004. [42] The Edmonton World Masters Games commissioned 12 C-Lions from Open Ocean Outriggers. John Roberts of Calgary Canoe Club assisted with financing of the 12 C-Lions for the Edmonton World Masters Games. All 12 C-Lions were sold and most went to Ontario, providing a starter fleet of OC1s when outrigger canoeing was just beginning.

## **Exemplary Achievements**

Mel has continuously made outstanding contributions to further the success of paddlesports, Nordic events, and cycling throughout her career in BC. As board member and sales representative with British Columbia Sports Rep Association (BCSRA) since 2004, [43] Mel has marketed a diverse set of outdoors merchandise through her own company Ocean & Outdoor Sales, as well as Aqua Bound / Bending Branches paddles / kayaks, Swagman racks storage, Salus Marine Wear / PFDs, and Kahuna Paddle Boards. [44] Mel leveraged industry contacts to secure product sponsorship for the Banff Mountain Film Festival for many years. Mel volunteered as Timing Official for Nordic Ski Events including 2008 and 2009, National and World, Nordic and Para Nordic Championships. Mel also volunteered as Timing Official for Cross Country Skiing events at the 2010 Whistler Olympics and Para-Olympics Games. [45]

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Note	Article	Link
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