



Huaka`i imi loa`a

A Journey of Discovery

Journal from HOCVS Voyages

Written by Matt Muirhead

Nihoa Island

Our strategy was simple, paddle a canoe from our home to the island of Nihoa, 165 miles Northwest of Kauai. Fourteen of us showed up on the beach that day with the same spirit of self discovery held by the ancient Polynesian voyagers who travelled these waters hundreds of year ago. With minimal trip preparation, we had a quiet reverence as we gently left the warm shore. It became a **huaka`i imi loa`a** (journey of discovery) more than a destination.

A canoe positions you in the elements. Every sense in your body awakens; you understand your weaknesses very quickly. A long voyage will create deep soul searching, connecting you with your past and giving you a clear view of

who you are and can become. I didn't grasp the power of the canoe to connect our past and present until this voyage, with this group which would become known as the Hawaiian Outrigger Canoe Voyaging Society (HOCVS). As we quietly paddled the canoe out of Hanalei Bay, toward Nihoa, pieces of my past flowed through me, awakening a sense of who I was and how I got here. When uncovered, the path we each took to arrive on the beach that morning was lined with familiar good fortune and common threads that now, woven together, make us akin. We kept looking back, the island still there, waiting to leave the world we knew behind, looking forward to the discovery ahead knowing the power and strength it would require.

Daylight was filled with building

anticipation for the coming night. Our approach to paddling was also simple; two crews of seven would paddle for one hour intervals. Crew changes were done in the water, by jumping from the escort boat (a 45 ft. Radden fishing boat). During the day the water was welcomed, in the dark of night, loathed. In daylight, we were laying the foundation. Paddling through familiar feelings, getting ready to arrive at a place in our minds unknown to us, a place we all wanted to go, the moonlit night.

At nightfall the crew paddled hard, trying to get warm, using new adrenalin. We were about 65 miles from Kaua`i and eleven hours into the journey. The moon was just appearing at our backs, it was full. The sky was still dark. We paddled in darkness, everyone quiet, and

adjusting to the swell, feeling it with a heightened sense, a perspective you can't get in the daylight. I was steering this leg, trying to locate a star to help with our course. We had paddled for 20 minutes when a large star moved slowly toward us. I could see

and cultural leader, the visionary for this journey, lead us in chants, **ho`okupu** (IT) (offerings), **awa** (IT) ceremony, and a prayer dedicated to **na kupuna** (IT) (those who lived on the island in the past), the **aina** (IT) (land) itself and those who travel here

have hoped for, fourteen lives grateful for discovering the past and encouraged about the future. We paddled to Nihoa with the strength of community.

Mokumanamana



everyone's head turn slightly in unison to look up, watching it fall from the darkened sky. Streaking right at us like a rocket, burning out just before it reached the ocean. No one said a word, no one missed a stroke, I could see as all five heads returned back in a focused line. It was a magical moment. We were six bodies moving through the water, connected by the spirit this journey would provide, no words were needed. It would be a special night.

Nihoa rose from the ocean like giant spires on a cathedral. Though small in size, the island is tall and easy to spot from the ocean. After a long night and 14 hours of paddling for each crew, 28 hours total, the canoe was again floating lightly over the water. We moved with greater speed, the crew was committed to finish strong. Kimokeo Kapahulehua our spiritual

and feel the power of the island and surrounding ocean. Dramatic cliffs circle the leeward side of the island, and a small white sand beach facing the windward side. We would not set foot on Nihoa. We simply floated in the shadow of the tall cliffs, feeling the spirit of the land. The voyage was not about exploring land, it was about connecting the ocean in-between the islands. We gave thanks for a safe voyage, the clean blue ocean, the surrounding birds and the unspoiled overpowering spirit of the area.

We tied the canoe onto the 45 foot fishing boat and battened everything down for the tough, punishing 18 hour trip into the seas and wind back to Kaua`i. Not many words were spoken on the ride home. The return voyage produced a suffering and pounding that tested us to the core. The ocean gave us back more than we could

A few days before departing from Nawiliwili Harbor, on the island of Kaua`i, we blessed and named our specially outfitted Bradley voyaging canoe - **Ke Alaka`i O Ko`u Mau Kupuna** (In the pathway of our ancestors). The Hawaiian Outrigger Canoe Voyaging Society (HOCVS) was officially formed shortly after our voyage from Kaua`i, Hawaii to Nihoa Island in 2004. The HOCVS's purpose is to perpetuate the Hawaiian culture of traditional long distance outrigger canoe voyaging, through education and experience, uphold a stewardship and accord with nature, strengthen the spiritual and cultural connections to the Hawaiian islands, and experience the harmony, strength and respect that arises when men and women of all ages paddle a canoe towards a common goal.

Last year we were simply thirteen men

and one woman paddling to Nihoa. It demanded every bit of physical, emotional and spiritual strength we could muster. All who survived that



trip will forever have a bond of true survival.

This voyage was defined by the enormous scope of the trip and logistics. The length and isolation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, now designated the Northwestern Hawaiian National Marine Monument, does not permit just getting in a canoe and paddling. We laboured through the dynamic that the farther we ventured from land the greater the cost and logistics like: paddlers, food, safety gear, a much larger escort craft and support crew. With a year of planning, gathering support from sponsors and securing an escort boat with the range and size to carry twenty people, we were ready. Our next voyage would be - Nihoa to the French Frigate Shoals a distance of 295 miles. The voyage would take us past the island of Mokumanamana (Tern Island). Mokumanamana is known for its numerous **wahi pana** (religious places) and **mea makamae** (cultural objects). Fifty-five cultural places are known, of which 33 are religious, 17 are shelter caves, and 2 sites are of unknown function. These cultural sites are thought to date primarily before the habitation sites on Nihoa Island were abandoned in the eighteenth century. Because the island is small, dry and has little soil suitable for agriculture, it is thought that Hawaiians probably travelled to Mokumanamana from Nihoa and other Hawaiian Islands primarily for religious purposes. In addition to constructing religious structures, Hawaiians made **ki'i pohaku** or stone human images while on Mokumanamana. More than 11 of

these stone ki'i are known. Other activities that took place on the island are indicated by the production and use of stone adzes, grindstones, stone bowls, and fishing tools.

We loaded gear and **Ke Alaka'i O Ko'u Mau Kupuna** aboard the **Makani Olu** a 95 foot motor, three mast sailboat. We motored and sailed to Nihoa and launched the wa'a at 4:00 pm Monday, August 15, 2005. The paddling was challenging between Nihoa and Mokumanamana, with strong currents and 5 to 8' following seas. The Northwest wind swell was complicated by a competing South swell. Before the darkness, we weighted the ama to compensate for the cross swell. The canoe hull was designed light, slipping down swells and picking up speed easily. Communication and visibility were enhanced this year with a specially constructed radar reflector pole and light that we fastened behind seat six. During the night, this made it easier to spot the canoe in high seas and during changes. We did not risk water changes this year due to the growing presence of sharks and opted for an inflatable raft tethered to the escort boat. The riskiest part of this venture was trying to get back on deck from the inflatable which was dancing to the opposite tune of the escort boat. One second you are eight feet below the deck and the next five feet above.

Two crews of eight traded paddling at one hour intervals. With two extra paddlers per crew the physical demands were manageable and the

accommodations aboard Makani Olu were like a palace compared to our old fishing boat from last year. The Makani Olu is not a fast boat. With full sails and a bit of motor help she can do 7 knots. With the first landmark of Mokumanamana about 30 hours away, each crew turned their hours into a challenge to "pass the escort boat". Each crew would gently push each other throughout the hour. With a gentle push from the swells, we would forget the fatigue and make that run special by travelling past the escort boat. At the crew change, faces were exhausted and exhilarated. The crew would be bonded by the feat and energised about their potential. The escort boat was the benchmark, not all runs were pretty. Sometimes we fell behind and had to dig deep to make up the distance. It became a personal challenge that we each tackled every hour day and night.

After 193 miles we made it to Mokumanamana, arriving in 32 hours at 12:00 midnight on August 17. The full moon outlined the island creating a hazy mysterious feel. We waited until daylight to take stock of our supplies. Reviewing our fuel and water resources for the remaining 100 miles to French Frigate Shoals and the 475 miles back to Kaua'i, we were forced to conclude the trip at Mokumanamana. The original plan to utilise the sailing ability of our vessel and conserving fuel during the onset of the trip was thwarted by the weather. Light winds had become our enemy, having to motor all the way to



Nihoa from Kaua`i. Even with the motor running, we arrived at our starting point seven hours later than planned. Though severely disappointed not to reach our goal, the crew was tested and resolved to come back another day.

The physical ability required to voyage is much like the effort required to race. Our physical test however, was defined by our ability to keep the body always at ready - for days. We went through the same physical and mental moments, just for longer periods. We felt the adrenalin at the start, the pain before the second wind, hours of rhythm, self doubts midway, deep resolve, and finally easily floating through the final hours. The crew included two young women and eight young men, none had experienced paddling beyond 40 miles from shore.

The voyage opened our core, discovering who we are. All that is important to us was melted away by the physical drone of each hour, turning inside with a uniquely intimate experience. One young Hawaiian paddler said "the spiritual element that I experienced during the voyage is what I hold most dear to me...the years that my ancestors have established a genealogical connection with these islands was evident during our voyage". The spiritual side of paddling is heightened when you get beyond the physical, when the rest of the world is

left behind and the basic elements are simplified into water, land, canoe and man. That spirit became clear as we left Kaua`i, and was even stronger when we arrived at Mokumanamana. Perhaps this was also felt by ancient voyagers as they too took on the challenge of these waters connecting their mana (IT) (spirit) with those that live within the water, the canoe, the land and in man. Perhaps it is their spirit that lingers. Perhaps by travelling the same path, we are able to feel what they felt and pass it on to others.

Hawaiian Canoe Voyagers Reach Destination

On August 15 2006, the Hawaiian Outrigger Canoe Voyaging Society (HOCVS) returned to Kaua`i after having reached Laysan Island on the morning of August 11. The team paddled a 40-foot traditional Hawaiian outrigger canoe through the newly formed NW Hawaiian Islands National Marine Monument, which encompasses some of the most isolated waters in the world. Beginning at Mokumanamana (Necker) Island, a team of 16 paddled 461 miles in 3 days and 11 hours to arrive at Kauo (Laysan). One mile wide and 1 1/2 miles long, and home to 2 million breeding sea birds and 240 monk seals, Laysan lies in the middle of the Monument, 900 miles Northwest of Honolulu.

Members of HOCVS were among the

first people to gain entry into the newly created National Marine Monument, which extends 1,200 miles from Nihoa Island to Kure Atoll. HOCVS extends its gratitude to the State of Hawai`i DLNR Aquatic Division and NOAA for granting permission to enter the Monument and State waters.

Kanu Culture E-Zine will cover the latest HOCVS voyage in more detail in an upcoming issue.

Sponsors:

Kialoa Paddles, PaddleMe.com
paddlewear, Da Kine, Maui Jim, West Marine, Brookfield Homes Hawaii,
Maui N`o Ka `Oi magazine,
Honua`ula, Dr. John Hedrick

Members of the paddling crew were:

Kimokeo Kapahulehua, Maui; Chris Luedi, Maui; Jamie Woodburn, Maui; Kathryn Hughes, Maui; Mike Spalding, Maui; George Rixey, Maui; Chris Smith, Maui; Terry Quisenberry, Maui; Jeff Meadows, Maui; Kendall Struxness, Kaua`i; Matt Muirhead, Kaua`i; Scott Funk, Kaua`i; Kama Hahn, Moloka`i; Dave Loustalot, California; Scott Woodburn, Florida; Frank Negri, New York

Support Staff:

Michael Gilbert, Photographer; Grant Thompson, Crew Chief; Joshua Circle-Woodburn, Alternate Paddler; Jason Hilford, Journalist.

