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Outrigger Adventures with a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts

A few years ago while vacationing in Kauai Hawaii we would often take in the last hours of daylight with a happy hour on the lanai overlooking the ocean at Wailua Bay. Watching the sunset was not our only entertainment while sipping on coconut rum cocktails as the bay was alive with wind surfers, paddle boarders and outrigger canoe teams practicing in front of the crimson backdrop. The outriggers were most numerous and consistent every evening. Watching them must have subconsciously planted the paddling seed in my mind to try this sport.

My wife Melodie has been involved in Dragon Boating for over 12 years. She started me paddling last year as a member of Fort Fusion. We really enjoyed participating in a competitive sport together. As a way of getting extra paddle time to hone mostly my technique we added outrigger paddling to our Saturdays mornings schedule.

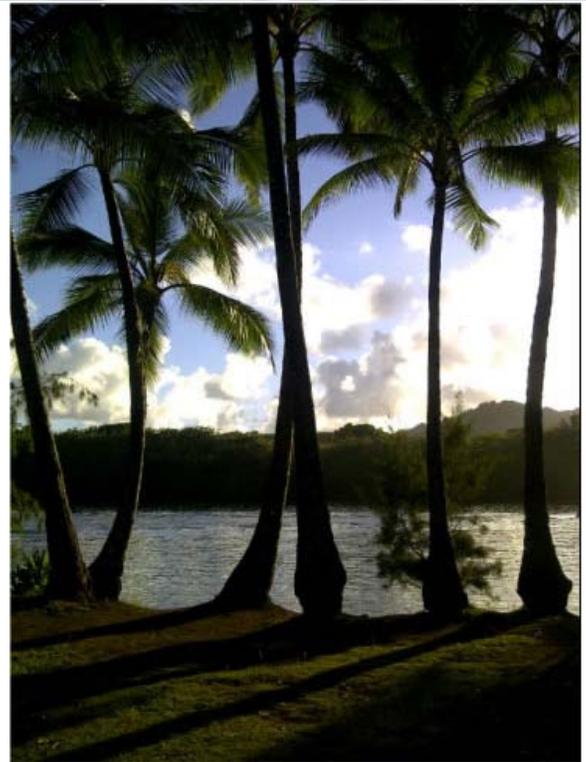


The Wailua River is the only navigational river in Hawaii. The river flows into the ocean at Wailua Bay. These waterways and surrounding lands are a very sacred place for the Hawaiians as it was once the home of royalty. There still are several historical sites along the waters edge so you can see and feel the cultural heritage as you travel along these waters. In a way similar to the Fort in historic Fort Langley. We seem to have a lot in common.

Our first outrigger paddle experience was on Sunday morning 8:30 AM. After taking off our sandals to board the canoe with bare feet, (a Hawaiian tradition showing respect) we took two OC-6's and headed up the Wailua River about 3 k to the Fern Grotto. (A fascinating lava rock crater and waterfall covered with ferns which mostly grow upside down). Arriving well before any of the tourist boats, one of the paddlers Maureen, escorted us from the dock up the deserted boardwalk to this amazing piece of nature. It was so beautiful and to have it all to ourselves which made this moment very special.

On the paddle back I noticed the river current was not much of a advantage like it sometimes is on the Fraser river. We are fortunate to have wonderful views when paddling around our Fort Langley Canoe Club. The change in scenery along the Wailua River shorelines to lush green tropical vegetation with a mountain summit backdrop, was absolutely amazing. If you can believe it the warm river water was dotted with fresh flowers which had just recently fallen from the overhanging vegetation along the river banks. The paddlers had a laugh while joking that this was special welcoming gift just for us. It was very peaceful and the paddling became almost meditative in nature. The Kawaikini call this type of relaxing paddle "Cruising". Still after a one hour casual paddle my tee shirt was soaked from sweat (and they don't wear any PFD's.)

She was smart enough to split Melodie and I up so each canoe had the same disadvantage of carrying the "malihini". Sea was the steers person and I was delegated to seat 5 in her canoe. When I told her I was there to learn as much as I could she was quick to point out the competitive racers on the boat that I could keep my eye on. Then later she was kind enough to pick up on my weak left side rotation and reminded me this was not a tourist canoe and I need to reach and extend the bottom arm so it remained straight. This also created another chuckle from the paddlers at the back of the canoe. I immediately felt like one of the Kawaikini earning my seat in the canoe. Sea told us the Sunday morning "cruising" is the clubs "going to church" paddle. This was one of the best church services we have attended.



After the practice a group of the paddlers often head over to the Olympic Cafe in historic Kapaa town for breakfast and Bloody Marry's of course.....now where getting somewhere on the local secrets! Coconut Shrimp with a fresh mango salsa with a refreshing ice cold Bloody Marry . Great way to start the day!

We made our way back to the small grass park located beside the the clubs facilities, several times as our accommodations where not far from the clubs location. Each time we would find different groups using the river and outriggers.

On the weekends families would gather for picnics and bring down there own outrigger canoes for a day of family fun. This one particular family had decorated there outrigger with lei's of fresh flowers and woven green reeds for the day event. The kids where welcome to take the outrigger out on river on their own. Sometimes they paddle sometimes they use it as a diving platform, a obstacle for playing water tag or hide and seek. Bottom line they where have great family fun with the outrigger canoe. It seemed as if it was part of the family and I would assume had been pasted down from generation to generation.

One afternoon we where able to watch four high school outrigger canoe teams making there way up and down the river competing for first place. Once the practice was over the outriggers where as customary swung around and back paddled to the shore. They would pick up the 400 pound canoe as a group and placed them on round elongated floats. This would allow the team to roll the outrigger carefully up the river bank under the tents and trees which provide welcomed shade for the canoes. The canoes would rest on rubber tires strategically placed on the ground.

On this afternoon one of the canoes under the tent was transformed into a buffet table and fill with food and fresh fruit where the four hungry teams would gathered for the feast. They sure where having fun and it was obvious the social and community aspect of canoeing where very popular with the young students.

When we first arrived at the Wailua River two of the Kawaikini clubs OC-6 where still on trailers, ama's removed ready for transportation to higher ground. How ironic that an earthquake on the Queen Charlette islands a few days before we left BC could have devistated our Sunday morning paddle with the Kawaikini Club. We where all very thankful that the tsunami warning for the islands turned out to be only a minor wave as it could have easily taken out all their clubs outrigger canoes.

It was also very interesting that on my first Saturday morning OC-6 paddle back in Fort Langley our dragon boat coach Dennis was steers person who also advised me half way around Brea Island....." your left side rotation was weak , you need to reach and extend the bottom arm , that's it keep the left arm straight..... Go figure! I just heard that a week ago.

By the way I told the Kawaikini paddlers not to worry as I would tell my fellow Fort Langley paddlers their club is in Maui not Kauai, the beautiful garden island of Hawaii. Melodie and I have been very fortunate to meet such a wonderful group of paddlers. I encorage you all to reach out to other clubs if you're traveling and have the time. Let's also make sure we look after any "malihini" paddlers should we get a request as well.

Aloha



t1 Updated on January 30, 2013

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