

# How ROUGH Was It?

By Gerry DeBenedetti

The Waikiki Roughwater Swim is always held on Labor Day Monday, but 2003 saw the convergence of super high tide, outgoing tide, strong Diamond Head current, reversal in the Kaiwi Channel, AND Hurricane Jimena, passing on the southern tip of the Big Island. Bad timing!

The 17 orange race buoys are set early on the morning of the race, and although there was a current, at 7 a.m. it wasn't as extreme as it would be later, and the swimmers were warned at the start that the current was strong.

Unfortunately, as the morning progressed, the current intensified. The swim has staggered starts, with the hotties who walk on water starting first, and then in heats, with the slower swimmers last. Those were the swimmers least able to handle the worsening conditions.

An entry field of 1,000 saw only about 350 finishers. Another third dropped out and swam in under their own power and an equal number were rescued by Coast Guard and Fire Department rescue, boat patrols in place by the Waikiki Yacht Club, and our own two whalers with Don Isaacs and Sam Clemens at the wheels.

Honolulu Fire Department Battalion Chief James Arciero rec-

ommended two OCC members for Commendation, former General Manager Rick Lee, and two employees from the Beach Services staff. How is that for Outrigger Ohana? Quoting from the Commendation:

"...five individual who were instrumental in saving over 80 exhausted Roughwater participants...Hopefully the following narrative will do justice to their truly heroic actions...General Manager Richard Lee was watching the progress of the annual Waikiki Rough Water Swim offshore...He and OCC beach attendant Samuel Clemens raced out in the Club's Boston Whaler...OCC Beach Captain Don Isaacs who was in the other OCC Whaler...The two boats made roughly 7 trips each between the troubled swimmers and shore, carrying 6 to 8 swimmers per trip. When the sheer numbers of swimmers trying to climb into the boat got to be too much they threw out all of their flotation gear for those swimmers they had to leave behind..."

"...OCC members Benjamin Komer, who was on a paddleboard, and Anthony Hunt, who was in the race, helped to keep the swimmers left behind together and kept them from panic through their own calm presence and constant verbal reassurances.... these [five] gentle

men accounted for over 80 witnessed rescues.

"...these "heroes" were in the right place at the right time and did the right thing to help avert a near tragedy of 'Titanic' proportions. Their quick actions speak highly of the high traditions of the Outrigger Canoe Club members and staff and of their own exemplary character." Mahalo!

See related Employee of the Month story on Sam Clemens for his personal account of this rescue effort.

And another amazing story. In three different age groups, three OCC members finished in 98th, 99th, and 100th place, within 33 seconds of each other. What are the chances? Apparently these swimmers came in to the surf line, and swam as close to Waikiki as they could, going back out to make the final turn buoy to swim in the Hilton channel.

The only two buoys that must be followed are the two right turn markers, and in between, you may choose your own line. Walter Guild and Ernie Leskovitz came in together, having swum the course for several days before and "feeling" what was up.

Ernie says "it was great!", and of course, he and Walter's time reflects that early starts and coming in to the Waikiki reef line made the difference. They are among those who blame Hurricane Jimena for the unusual current.

Chris Worrall, who is a good swimmer, reflects what happened to most everybody else, in taking over three hours to finish. Give him credit, dogging it out there for that long is really amazing, since 600+ other swimmers either had no strength or no choice because they were going backwards faster than they were going forward.

Bob Mosen, first OCC member to finish must have been one of those hotties walking on top of the water.

Bob Mosen, 1st, M55, 1:21:01  
Roger Cundall, 3rd, M55, 1:37:07  
Ernie Leskovitz, 1st, M65, 1:37:11  
Walter Guild, 4th, M45, 1:37:39  
Ingrid Rolles, 4th, F30, 1:39:48

Bruce Sloan, 12th, M50, 1:48:45  
David Rietow, 2nd, M60, 1:48:56  
Stefan Reinke, 10th, M45, 1:49:14  
Laurie Foster, 3rd, F45, 1:53:49  
Kristi Torkildson, 4th, F13-14, 2:02:15  
Steve Torkildson, 20th, M45, 2:23:52  
Michael Mullahey, 23rd, M30, 2:24:16  
Twain Newhart, 44th, M40, 2:25:43  
Chris Worrall, 51st, M40, 3:16:35

Note the father-daughter Torkildson times above. They were in different heats, but it is a well known fact that daughter has beaten Dad's times before, and he is most proud of that.

Although DNF is sometimes an embarrassment, not this Roughwater. In many cases, bailing out showed better judgement. Bonnie Eyre, who usually places in her age group, said she looked at the seaweed on the OCC beach, she looked at the waves, she looked at the tide, and said "I don't need this. I'm supposed to go on vacation tomorrow. I'd rather do that!" Good choice.

Candes Meijide Gentry, our Xterra Girl, "enjoyed" her first helicopter ride. She says she is afraid of heights, but when it came to continued clinging to buoy #4 for another hour, or riding the basket in, she chose the latter. Candes was in heat D, with a later, more disastrous current, and it was her first Roughwater.

At the first turn buoy she was swimming with Ingrid Rolles, and then they began inching along. She tried to swim in, but couldn't, and then swears she saw a shark, and began to hyperventilate. She found a group to swim with, and made it to two more buoys when the backward drift was too swift. They all began to cling to buoy #4, when it became clear there was no forward progress, only Diamond Head current. The #4 buoy was completely underwater, with people holding their breath, and holding on to each other. After 30 minutes of this, the helicopter came, and two at a time, they were transported to Kaimana Beach, back to the

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The Honolulu Fire Department presented a commendation to Sam Clemens, Center



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Hawaiian landscapes in oil by Betty Hay Freeland