



By **RON HAWORTH**

## **An ancient sport**

The great influx of today's surfing contests on a hundred beaches around the globe has mostly stemmed from the initial Makaha Championships 15 years ago. The sport today, to a great degree, is what the Wakiki Surf Club has pumped into Makaha yearly.

But surfing is much, much older.

Scholars believe it journeyed north of the Equator somewhere around 500 A.D., when the first canoes left Bora Bora's lush peaks sinking astern.

The surfing skill these Polynesian seafarers brought with them was indeed crude, perhaps more of a child's pastime than an adult pursuit. But it was along Hawaii's golden beaches and scoured lava coastline that it grew in popularity, finally achieving a high degree of development.

In these early days surfing was interwoven into Hawaiian culture. Along with other popular sports, it played an important role in the annual three-month celebration from October to January known as "Makahiki".

Sporting tournaments attracted thousands of spectators. Renowned surfers spent weeks, even months, shaping and polishing their giant koa boards as they redied themselves for sporting battle.

## **High stakes**

And "battle" is an apt word to describe these early surfing contests. Nothing was held back.

Surfers, confident of victory, put everything on the line when challenged by a rival. Canoes, crops, indenturing oneself to another—even a man's life—could be at stake.

What unimpeachable judges they must have had!

Then, between the 1800 and 1900, the haoles settled in the Sandwich Islands. These black-frocked gentlemen brought their New England ideas and long underwear to the tropics and immediately it was sinful for naked natives to enjoy themselves in the warm water.

During this time the sport lost its followers by the thousands and when the turn of the century dawned the sport was all but forgotten—or never known—by most Island inhabitants.

The man most deserving of credit for reviving surfing in Hawaii is generally agreed to be a haole, Alexander Hume Ford.

In 1908, aided by a few close cohorts, Ford leased a section of Waikiki Beach from Queen Liliuokalani and founded the Outrigger Canoe Club.

Their creed—"Maintain a spot on Waikiki Beach where surfing and canoe enthusiast may keep their canoes and surfboards that these royal sports may be preserved in Hawaii."

## **The rebirth**

Shortly thereafter a surfing contest was held at Waikiki, ending the long absence of such competition. But still surfing progressed at a snail's pace, and it wasn't till the mid-thirties that surfing got to Makaha and a date with destiny.

Since Makaha's baptism, surfing has exploded and now there are more surf contests than waves accommodate them.

It was the Waikiki Surf Club that began it all with their founding in 1947, and it was many members-to-be who first begun the migration to Makaha.

And, fittingly, it was Makaha which was in time to become the site for the famous meet which today bears its name.

Others helped. Bud Browne filmed "Trek To Makaha" and showed it along the California coast. The result: the great wave rush of the fifties. Makaha was king.

It was also a period when board design breakthroughs were being recorded on Makaha Beach. Legendary names to gremmies around the world like George Downing and Buzzy Trent were testing their radical ideas in Makaha's point surf.

In the modern era of surfboard riding, this was the beginning.