

History of Outrigging

Outrigger canoe paddling has its origins in the development and spread of the coastal culture in the Pacific Rim region about 30,000 years ago. During this time the canoes played an integral role in the survival and transmigration of ancient cultures.

It was not until many thousands of years later that outrigger racing became a competitive sport and maritime advancement bore witness to the evolution of the canoe into the sleek racing boats of today. The first canoe race, initially for men, was in the Hawaiian Islands in Waikiki in 1917.

Outrigger canoe racing in Australia is relatively young. The first Australian club emerged on the Gold Coast in 1983. The sport started in the Whitsundays as competition between the staff on the resort islands and slowly spread out from there. Sydney greeted its first club in 1989, the same year that the newly formed AOCRA held its first National Titles.

Outrigger Traditions

- Blessing of the canoe. All canoes need to be blessed prior to their initial launch, and at races, the regatta fleet should also be blessed prior to racing.
- Pointing the canoe out to sea. Where possible, always try to park the canoe with the bow pointing towards the water or out to sea
- Never step over a canoe. Always walk around.
- Respect the canoe. A canoe should never be dragged or pushed up a beach, it should always be lifted.

Above all, it is important to treat the canoe as a member of your crew. Treat the canoe like it is a member of your family as your life depends on it in the ocean.

AOCRA

The Australian Outrigger Canoe Racing Association (AOCRA) was formed in 1988. The sport has enjoyed rapid growth in recent years with the development of clubs in other states, expanding the sports power base and spiritual home from northern Queensland and the Whitsunday region to make it a truly national sport.

Currently there are some 68 clubs with a members' base exceeding 3800 members across all states and territories. This is a large expansion from the 11 clubs operating in 1990.

AOCRA oversees racing throughout Australia, with individual clubs organizing racing events with assistance from the Zone Associations. The rules set out by AOCRA are based on those created by the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association and are adapted to encapsulate the circumstances Australian paddlers endure.

Racing

Racing takes on three forms; iron marathons, change-over marathons and sprints. These are raced by six person canoes (OC6), two person canoes (OC2) and solo canoes (OC1).

Sprints are held over 500 - 3000 metres. Iron marathons vary in distances between 5 and 30 kilometres. Change-over marathons generally, but not all ways, exceed 30 kilometres. This form of race in OC6 involves a crew of 9 or 10 paddlers, with the extra "relief" paddlers alternating throughout the race. This is performed whilst the canoe is moving. When a change-over is performed, the relief paddlers wait in the water, and grab the side of the moving canoe to pull themselves in. The alternating paddlers simultaneously fall out of the canoe on the opposite side.

Age divisions include junior (10 to 19 years), 21 and under, open men and women, master men (over 40) and women (over 35), senior master men (over 50) and women (over 45) and golden master men and women (over 55).

Due to the vast size of Australia, Zone Associations have been established to oversee racing in different geographical areas. Each Zone conducts approximately 6 Grand Prix regattas over a six month period with the AOCRA National Championships being held during these Zone seasons.

Additional to this, various other major events are held annually, including the prestigious and challenging Hamilton Island Cup held in the beautiful Whitsundays, and the 48km Gold Coast Cup between Coolangatta and Southport. Other fun/competition regattas or events are actively promoted by AOCRA.

The future potential of the sport in this country is endless because of the climate and coastal environments that provide us with all manner of ocean conditions in which to play practice and ultimately excel in outrigger canoe racing. The sport has come of age in Australia.

Friendships, health, fitness, an affinity with an aquatic environment and a cultural education will be fostered, along with a deeper sense of self obtained by meeting the very special demands that outrigger canoe racing and paddling makes on the paddler, providing the fuel for your long term involvement with the sport.

