

Gift of spruce comes full circle as Hawaiians canoe tours Southeast

The 57' wooden double-hulled Hawaiian ocean-voyaging canoe, *Hawai'iloa*, has completed a tour of Southeast Alaska on a mission of thanks to the Native people of the region and Sealaska Corporation, who donated the massive Sitka Spruce logs five years ago for the construction of the canoe.

"The Hawaiians brought the canoe to show the people what they did with the gift logs," said Ernie Hillman, lands manager for Sealaska Corporation and unofficial point man for the Southeast Alaska portion of the *Hawai'iloa*'s 24-day tour of the Pacific Northwest Inside Passage and Southeast Alaska.

"The voyage of the *Hawai'iloa* allowed the people of Hawaii, represented by its crew, to show their

appreciation and give thanks to the Haida and Tlingit Tribes and Sealaska Corporation, for their most generous donation of spruce logs," a letter from the Bishop Museum in Honolulu said. The tour was underwritten by the Bishop Museum and several other benefactors, including Alaska Marine Lines, who offered to transport the 10-ton canoe from Juneau back to Seattle.

A display at the Bishop Museum introduces guests to the *Hawai'iloa* display this way: "Over 1,600 years ago, voyaging canoes carried Polynesian settlers to these shores. *Hawai'iloa*, a modern version of a traditional voyaging canoe, is carrying Hawaiian culture into the 21st century. A voyage in cultural knowl-

edge and awareness, *Hawai'iloa* celebrates the magnificent achievements of seafaring Hawaiians, past and present."

"The gift (of spruce logs) really connected people," Nainoa Thompson, Hawaiian navigator said. "At first glance, you would think that Native Alaskan and Native Hawaiians are much different. But there are more similarities than differences. We both have a great maritime legacy. We are both struggling to maintain our history and culture. I see the Alaska trip as a voyage of sharing."

Thompson was one of the originators of the Polynesian Voyaging Society which was founded in 1973. They recognized that navigation by the stars in voyaging ca-

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noes was the highest art of ancient Polynesia. Much of what Thompson knows about this ancient art, he learned from Mau Piailug, 63, of Micronesia who was the last elder Thompson could find who had the knowledge of traditional Polynesian navigation without instruments.

"The story of the *Hawai'iloa* has a very rich texture," said Leo Barlow, president and CEO of Sealaska Corporation. "Sealaska's involvement in this voyage of cultural sharing began with an old friendship between noted Hawaiian artist Herb Kane and Judson Brown, a retired board member of Sealaska Corporation. Kane told Judson that the Native Hawaiians wanted to build an ocean voyaging canoe as closely as they could to the traditional materials and design

used in the old Hawaiian canoes."

"The story of their journey to find the knowledge to build and sail this canoe took them right back to their cultural roots," Barlow said. "It became a focal point for the rebirth of interest in themselves, and it's a story that only they can tell. I think that's why they decided to come up to Southeast Alaska, because they wanted to share their rebirth firsthand with those who helped them along the way."

Sealaska Corporation became involved in the Native Hawaiians journey when the Hawaiians realized, after an exhaustive two year search of the Hawaiian Islands, that there were no longer koa trees of sufficient size to build the *ka'ele* or main hulls of their great ocean voyaging canoes. They looked to the Pacific Northwest for the ma-

terials for the project.

Sealaska Corporation helped the Native Hawaiians search throughout Southeast Alaska for suitable logs for the project. They found the massive trees on U.S. Forest Service land, and Sealaska arranged for the purchase of the logs. A vital part of the project was arranging for removal of the trees from the woods. They were felled by expert Sealaska logger Chuck Anderson, who came out of retirement to tackle the special job. Paul Marks gave a traditional Tlingit blessing of the trees before they were felled. Sylvester Peele from Hydaburg offered a Haida blessing. The late Bill Woods, Sr., of Klawock, and a chanter with the Native Hawaiians also offered prayers and a blessing.

After the logs were transported to Honolulu, a delegation of people from Sealaska went to the Hawaiian blessing before the carving began. At that time, the *Hawai'iloa* was also given a Tlingit name by Dr. Walter Soboleff of Tenakee Springs. He named the canoe "*Kutx.ayanah' Kayata'*," which means "steered by the stars."

It's apparently not the first time our cultures have shared our great trees," Barlow said. "Historic accounts by Archibald Menzies, the surgeon and naturalist who accompanied Captain George Vancouver to Hawaii said that largest single canoe they saw in the islands in 1794 was about 60 foot long and made of one pine tree from the Pacific Northwest which had drifted on shore.

"So we shared our magnificent trees in the past, but we didn't know each other and we didn't know we were sharing. Today, the Native Hawaiians and Tlingits, Haidas and Tsimshians are making history together with this meeting and cultural exchange," Barlow said.

Byron Mallott, CEO of Sealaska when the logs were donated, said, "Both the reality and the symbolism of the project breathes hope and inspiration into all peoples seeking to maintain their traditions, heritage and culture in a society that does not place a high priority on such things. In your canoe, you carry all of us who share your vision and aspiration for a people to live and prosper with their future firmly built on the knowledge of their heritage and traditions."

According to Barlow, "The Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people of this region made a contribution to this project of huge trees, something we feel is important and sacred to us. What the Hawaiians brought back to us are the canoes and the knowledge of engineering and celestial navigation that they feel is sacred to them. It was a powerful time of sharing."

The tour included 10 communities in Southeast Alaska.

Information courtesy of Sealaska Corporation.