

Team Samoa Nei Galo Savai'i Crossing 2008 by John Papalii

Samoa Nei Galo Vaa Alo Team would like to share with you our story about not only conquering the Savaii Crossing but also share our overall success of the trip to Samoa.

We arrived at Faleolo Airport on Friday 30th May (Samoa time) and were guided to our accommodation in Vaivase by our fellow team member Fred Puni, where we stayed for a couple of nights thanks to Fred's Sister (Angie P Young). The weather on arrival was surprisingly very comfortable so a positive start we thought.

The next day was the day of the 15km race but unlike our NZ race schedules, this race was due to start at 3pm, my kind of start time so we had a good sleep in, had a bit of time to sort out some personal admin and then we sat down as a team and had a good lunch before heading off to Mulinuu to race. Our plan for the race was to enjoy it, paddle hard, execute the basics and whatever happens after that happens. Although there are not as many teams participating compared to our Tauranga or Mokoia Island regattas, the quality was still there with Samoa's top open men's crew Pualele and their rivals Tautai present, also want to mention John Goeke's crew from American Samoa making an appearance.

The race started at Mulinuu with the halfway point a yellow buoy in front of Blue Marlin's and then returning back, it was flat conditions with hot but reasonably comfortable temperatures and the depth of the water ranged from very shallow to medium depth, the race was run alongside the shoreline until maybe the last quarter of the course which made good view for spectators, the result after shadowing Pualele open mens for the majority of the race was a first place to Team Samoa Nei Galo in a time of 1hr 08mins, the turning point was when we took a more inside and direct course to the last buoy and pretty much just holding from there, so good effort to the team and our V1 supporters Tina, Diana and Tino.

Following the race, Pualele invited our team to their headquarters at Taumeasine Reserve which consists of little fale's, 2x 6man Mirage canoes and primo training waters, there we laughed about our race tactics and talked paddling, a very good evening indeed.

The next day was a recovery rest day which we utilised by going for tour drive around the east coast of Upolu, well most of it...we made a quick stop at Fred's uncles tourist attraction which oversees some real green forests and the Sopoaga Falls, a must do. We also made a lunch/swim stop at Taufua Beach which has cheap but comfortable accommodation, actually little fales with a mattress in it, cost is about 40 to 50 Tala which equates to about \$20.00NZD, affordable and the beach...prestine. So after our tour, it was back to Vailima where we were now accommodated for the remainder of our trip, courtesy of Fred Puni, thanks mate,oh but I dont know about getting the coffee table for a bed a second time on a trip, go figure our oldest paddler James Papalii gets the

couch as well and the youngest Josh Perese gets the bed???

Its now Monday 2nd June, Samoa Independence Day, the celebrations actually starts with a March from as early as 6am to the official start time 9am which is when the Samoan National Flag is raised. This flag was raised across the road from our race venue with the Villages of Samoa paying their respects to the Head of State Tamasese by entertaining him with song and dance samoan style...very entertaining but couldn't stay, there was some racing to be done.

The race schedule was the 500m heats for V6 Open Men's, V1 Open Men's and Women's and 1500m Open Men's straight finals, so again, not your average National sprints schedule but still very competitive and fun to be a part of. To summarise the event, Team Samoa again dominated every race making every final with Diana Tauvale taking out the womens V1 500m, Josh Perese taking out the men's V1 500m, I must mention that the other finalists were Mark Malaki Williams (2nd) and Michael Sala (3rd), a 4th finalists opted to pull out and save himself for the 500m V6 Mens final which paid off as they (Pualele) pipped us at the end, no excuses, they sprint well and as for the 1500m, well we showed our experience in our turns and dominated that whole race, we enjoyed the regatta and if you've been to Rarotonga Vaka Eiva, it runs similar, it is competitive but mostly enjoyable. Following the races we had prizegiving at the Yacht club down the road where we picked up our Samoan made medals, very nice too, and some prizes, a good night again, more laughs, more networking and sharing knowledge, a paddling memory to take home once again.

It is now Tuesday 3rd June, the day before the Savaii Crossing but also the day to give back to our fellow paddlers, Team Samoa Nei Galo held a Paddling Coaching Clinic, this was a vital part of our programme as we wanted to share as much knowledge to our fellow Samoans. We discussed paddling equipment, prepping the V1 and V6, personal kit, technique, training and programmes, nutrition and safety, the clinic went for over an hour but was followed by some questions which we were happy to answer, we had our volunteer demo guy Josh Perese giving V1 demo's in the water as well, we thought he needed a swim, thanks Josh, the perks of being the youngest. So a successful clinic and a good turnout too.

As mentioned, the Savaii Crossing is tomorrow so its time to hydrate, sort out our water systems, check the forecasts, double check our food supplies and get some much needed early sleep. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case, we were scheduled to race at about 6am, we were now picking up trailers and towing canoes and re-lashing and unlashng canoes, all this was happening at about 10pm, yep, Samoan style, when towing facilities aren't exactly accessible, we make do and achieved the objective. Our crew ended up splitting up, with some sorting out a late dinner and shopping for our supplements and the rest to sort out the canoes, well we ended up sleeping before the big crossing at midnight, for the record, thats not the recommended sleeping time before a big paddle.

The morning of the Savaii Crossing started surprisingly okay considering our late

night but overall everyone was feeling more positive and excited to get the task done, that's the paddling attitude, so at 4:30am we made our 45min drive to Mulifanua to lash up the canoes for open conditions. I must say that while everyone was setting up the 2 canoes as the race was between Team Samoa Nei Galo (consists of Samoan paddlers from NZ) and Team Pualele Samoa (Samoa's Top Open Men's), there was already a feeling of achievement and positive spiritual emotion in the air, knowing we were going to create history and inspire our elders here in NZ and in Samoa, it was an honour to be a part of, the race was a minority reason, paddling 45km's for the Charities Mapuifagalele (Home of the Elderly), Faataua Le Ola (Youth Suicide) and Nuanua Ole Alofa (Disability Advocacy) as well getting to Savaii for the first time in style..a va'a alo...that's one for the grand kids, that's a better reason to paddle 45km's open water. In typical paddling tradition, we paid our respects and asked for guidance in a group prayer as well as going over the Safety procedures.

We started the race at 6:58am on my watch in reasonably calm conditions but it wasn't too long before the sun rose and started warming us up. We kept to our game plan which was prevention in every which way, which hydrating before we got thirsty, splashing each others back now and then to cool down, the occasional calling out of "Malo le Alo" or "Good Paddling", these are all little morale boosts and tactics which we all know help with the end result. It wasn't too long before we had left Pualele behind, right in the middle of the open water the swells got favourable and the tide was incoming so we made the most of it and caught as many bumps as we could, this kept us busy and also on target to setting a good time.

We arrived at Salelologa wharf, Savaii in 1hr 48mins and after paddling that whole course iron, we now went to the second part of our plan which was to execute the return paddle with changeovers, the Pualele team arrived in 1hr 55mins which was reasonably good, we had a good 6mins of supplements refuelling but the race was still on so we continued on knowing that Pualele was going to make changes too. Unlike the first half, the return trip was anything but, we had a full head wind which we thought was quite good for us, it cooled us down and therefore we no longer needed to worry about the heat, so throughout the return paddle, our 10min changes plan was working like clockwork until our little encounter with marine life nicknamed "Jaws", yep, little did we know, but we had a shark lurking during one of our changeovers and by the time we moved on it had almost surfaced below my seat and Mark's seat, thankfully we had only under 10km's to go, cos the changeovers were a little nerve racking from there on. To our disbelief, we made it, we achieved the goal and paddled from Mulifanua to Savaii and back in a time of 4hrs 11mins. We were met by the Little Sisters of the Poor (Mapuifagalele sisters), supporters of both Pualele Samoa and Team Samoa Nei Galo NZ and curious tourists from Aggey's Resort. Pualele completed their crossing in 4hrs and 33mins. Both crews were in good spirits with extraordinary being the word to describe the whole journey.

We finished the day with the presentation of the donations to Mapuifagalele

(Home of the Elderly) & Faataua Le Ola (Youth Suicide) and made a special thanks to Kat Roast of Aqua Watersports and her team for sponsoring the two support boats and drivers. Samu of the Samoa Observer paper was also on the Samoa Nei Galo support boat to cover the story of the crossing as well. Later in the evening we met with Samoan media: Samoa Broadcasting Channel (SBC) and TV3 who interviewed the Event Organiser Fred Puni and on air we were able to make the third presentation of donation to Nuanua Ole Alofa representative Nofovaleane Mapusua who is advocating for the Samoan National Council of Disabilities, keep up the good work us.

Well, with the main event out of the way and many more memories to store, we decided to go to Savaii the next day for an overnigher (by ferry of course) and for many of us this was the other highlight of the trip. My brother and I got to visit our Grandmother after not seeing her for over 19 years, it was amazing to see how far our parents had travelled to give us a life of opportunity, we also visited Diana's Grandmother and we had some time for a swim at the Safugi Fresh Water Rock pool before finishing at James Papalii's family household in Sapaalii where we accommodated for the night. A lovely traditional Samoan dinner was prepared and we even timed our arrival with the viewing of Tangata Pasifika and SBC coverage of our journey which was a bonus for us all.

We left Savaii on the 8am ferry and what was waiting was a very rough ride for some, thankfully some of us had sea legs and the stomach to handle the journey back, also glad to know we weren't paddling back as well. So Friday was a more relaxed day, with more gift buying, we also met up with NZ Band Ardijah who were there for a Rugby organised charity fundraiser.

So it is now Saturday 7th June and we are due to fly out at about 2am on Sunday 8th June (Samoa time), and with the whole trip being a total success, we couldn't believe our luck but we finished our trip at the Rugby Charity that Ardijah played at, coincidentally, one of the organisers Marj Moore is a family friend who happened to arrange a vehicle for our team and also arranged a whole table for our team. I must mention that it was awesome to help out Marj and her team set up the whole venue, that was our little thank you to her and their team for organising a great event so all credit to Marj, Karen and the team. At the charity function, we were in the company of Samoa's Head of State Tamasese, the NZ High Commissioner Caroline Birkley (who we had already met with during the week), the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa as well as Rugby Celebrities Pat Lam, NZ Sevens Captain DJ Forbes, Peter "Fats" Fatiafalo, Brian Lima and current Manu Samoa players. Many of the attendees were Corporate businesses and supporters of the event. Pat Lam also made a special mention of our Team and the Savaii Crossing during his speech which iced off the night so in return we gave him a lift to the airport as we were all on the same flight...word is he is still waiting to hear back if he gets the Auckland Super 14 Coaching job, good luck Pat, hope you get it.

I know it was a long story, but as you can see, it had to be told, what follows is hopefully a big outrigger event for Samoa which will benefit everyone...do the

math... we had objectives to fulfill, tasks to complete, and progress to be made within our 8 days, although only 8 days, every day was planned and executed the long way or via short cuts, our goal now is to come back next year with more teams and make this Savaii Crossing a part of the Annual International racing calendar as well as working together with the Samoan Outrigger Canoeing Association (SOCA) and including their Independence Regatta as part of the whole Savaii Crossing package. As for us Team Samoa Nei Galo which means "Lest We Forget", we will be back next year and continue our passion for our culture, Va'a Alo and will continue to give back to those who are need.

We would like to acknowledge and say Fa'afetai lava to the following Sponsors and Donors for making this happen for us all:

**NZ Donors: Lewis installations & Tuning (NZ),
Sapolu Law Firm (NZ)**

**Elite SAMOA Sponsors: Maria's Health Care Pharmacy,
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NZ, Samoa Island Designs Seve Sung Chan Chui, Siapouli Perese & Family,
Marj Moore**

**SUPPORT BOAT SPONSORS: (2 boats) from Aquasamoa Water Sports, (1
boat) Junior Meredith, (1 standby boat) Kevin Kolohase.**

Team & Event Medics: Medcen Hospital

**Canoe transportation Sponsors: Yvette Kerslake (Pickup) & Rasmussen
Engineering (trailer).**

**Thanks also for the support from the NZ Media: Tagata Pasifika, Radio
531 PI, Niu FM, Spasifik Magazine, & Samoan Media TV3, SBC TV, Corey &
Team at the FM radio station.**

**Not Forgetting the Outrigger canoeing community in South Auckland,
aswell as family & friends both in NZ and Samoa.**

***Team Samoa Nei Galo Va'a Alo wouldlike to wish Rudolf Berking Williams
all the best as he represents Samoa in K1 500m and 1000m events in
Beijing for the Olympics 2008... "Alo Malosi ma manuia le malaga".***



Team Samoa Nei Galo pictured with Mapuifagalele (Elderly Rest home), Fa'ataua Ole Ola (Youth Suicide) & Support Boat Sponsor Kat Roast of Aqua Samoa Watersports after the 45km Crossing.



The Outrigger Canoeing Coaching/Training Clinic



Mulifanua – The Start line, Savaii is in the distance somewhere, that was our paddle and back. 4 hrs and 11 minutes



Rugby Charity function – Special guests in the frame include Rugby greats Pat Lam, Joe Stanley, NZ sevens Captain DJ Forbes, Samoa Prime Minister and deputy Prime Minister, Samoa Head of State Tamasese and NZ High Commissioner Caroline Birkley.



Team Samoa Nei Galo and the Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa.



Team SNG and NZ Band Ardijah



Team SNG and the NZ High Commissioner Caroline Birkley.

