

Paddle board event turnout impressive

(Monday, October 23, 2006)

A POSITIVE turnout from local teams impressed organisers of the Inaugural Air Pacific Blue Water Classic event, which was held at Pacific Harbour on Saturday.

And for the first time ever, the paddle boarding event, which originally is an open-ocean cross-channel event, was

held in a river and much to the surprise of organisers, the alterations to the venue failed to dampen the paddlers.



Ian Muller, closest to camera, and Carol Sing complete the event at Pacific Harbour

The event which attracted paddlers from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, France and Japan featured 35 paddlers battling out at the Qaraniqio River alongside The Pearl Resort. Paddle Boarding is today amongst one of the fastest-growing water sports in the world and the initial route of the 15km race organised by Paddle for Peace was scheduled from Beqa Island to Pacific Harbour.

The first annual paddle for peace race was held in Bali in 2003 and the second annual event at the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.

"It's been amazing how the regular overseas paddlers adapted to the new environment and also it's been a spectacular advantage of promoting eco-tourism in Fiji," event director Ken Lucas said.

"Because of the dangers in weather conditions, we took the event to the river and this became a 13km course race," he said.

Top USA paddler George Plesk won the Perpetual Trophy after finishing first overall with fellow competitor Brian Szymanski taking out the overall in stock title in a time of 50 minutes and 22 seconds.

The local team comprised Ian Muller, who was the first local finisher in 12th position in 57mins, Lorraine Patterson in 27th in 1hr 7mins, Vuki Voi in 24th spot and Lionel Evans coming in 29th in place. Hawaiian woman Hanisi Duncan was the first women finisher in 55mins, 71-year-old American Mike Eaton was the oldest competitor and top Australian junior Simone Maxwell the youngest.

65-year-old Carol Sing of California was the oldest female competitor.

"It's been a success and we're already planning for the second event here next year and the Perpetual Trophy which was carved here will be displayed at the Fiji Visitors Bureau office," Lucas said.

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