PIONEER: a person who is among the first to explore or settle a new country or area.

(Synonyms: settler, colonizer, frontiersman, frontierswoman, explorer; trailblazer)

You can add channel swimmers Bill Pai, Keo Nakama, Harry Huffaker and Robin Isayama to that list of synonyms — all four were pioneers who took on the Molokai Channel and won.

- Pai was the first to swim across the Molokai Channel in 1939. (Pai was rowed 50 yards offshore to begin his journey, so his crossing is not considered an official crossing.)
- Nakama, an International Hall of Famer, was the first to officially cross the Molokai Channel in 1961 in 15:30.
- Huffaker was the second person to cross the channel six years later in 13:34 and the first to swim from Oahu to Molokai (the opposite direction) in 1972, in 16:15.
- In 1994, Isayama became the first woman to swim across the channel in 15:21.

South Africa’s Sarah Ferguson hopes to add her name to that elite list. Later this summer, Ferguson will attempt to become the first South African to swim across Molokai Channel.

“My love of ocean swimming started in Hawaii, and I was keen to try to do something challenging and different,” she says with pride. “The Molokai Channel will be my first major channel crossing.”

Ferguson learned about Molokai Channel while visiting Hawaii in 2011.

“I was invited to do my very first ocean race in Hawaii, and while at the race I saw the island of Maui and the thought entered my head to do the crossing from the Big Island to Maui,” says Ferguson. “After doing some research, I stumbled across Linda Kaiser, who directed me toward Molokai Channel as my first channel crossing.”

And it was Kaiser, the only woman to successfully swim all nine major channels in Hawaii, who convinced Ferguson to chase her dream.

“My love of ocean swimming started in Hawaii, and I was keen to try to do something challenging and different,” explains Ferguson. “After chatting to Linda, she helped persuade me that this was a better, viable option.”

And that includes night training in Cape Town’s cold water, 24-hour pool swims and sessions in high surf.

“I have done some swims in big swells and unpredictable seas, and I’m planning on a swim with sharks to prepare for potential interaction with sharks and the best way to respond,” she says.

And while sharks are a big concern for Ferguson, who spent 15 years swimming competitively while representing South Africa in multiple World Cups, they’re not her main concern.

“I have a huge respect for the ocean and all that is in it,” says Ferguson. “My main concern is the Portuguese Man-of-War.”

In the end, this one will be personal.

“One of my primary reasons for doing this swim is to create awareness for ocean conservation and to use this swim as a platform to develop my nonprofit organization Breathe Conservation and highlight the state of our oceans,” says Ferguson.

It’s what pioneers do.

“Blazing A Trail Across Molokai Channel

Sarah Ferguson moments before a swim in Durban, South Africa

PHOTO COURTESY CHRISTY HERSELMAN

Termiticide & Pest Control

Congratulations Martin Kraut
January Contest Winner of FREE Sentricon monitoring for 1 year.

FUMIGATION SPECIAL! $599*
Based on 16,000 cu. ft. 5 year warranty
591-2922
www.xtermcohawaii.com
Lic.: PC-201