

THE STORY OF SURFING

*Hawaii — Captain Cook Discovers Surfing — Revival
— California — Surfing in Australia — Surfboats
— Surf-skis — The Duke Shows How — The Hot-dog Board*

Where did surfing begin? Nobody knows for sure. Ricky Grigg believes that it originated in the southern islands near Tahiti, where the islanders found they could ride the waves lying on small wooden boards or kneeling on them. But, if it did begin there, it died out later, and the sport found its real home in a cluster of islands well to the north—Hawaii.

Hawaii

Surfing has been a popular sport in Hawaii for centuries. The Hawaiians, it seems, were the first to learn to ride a board standing up, and the myths and legends of the country are full of accounts of past kings who were admired for their skill and courage in cracking the big waves that in winter sweep down on the islands from Siberia and the North Pacific, and in summer roar up from the South Pacific. These native kings, or chiefs, took the lead in surfboard riding. They rode a special board called the Olo, which was about sixteen feet long and made of light wood. They organized competitions among themselves, and offered prayers and gifts to their local gods in the hope they would help them to do well in the contests.

But surfing was much more than a pastime for kings. Then, as now, the Hawaiians were a happy-go-lucky, sports-loving people. They enjoyed games such as bowling, boxing, stilt-walking, and even kite-flying. But they enjoyed water-sports most of all, and the most popular of these was surfing.

Everyone, chieftain and commoner, took part. The commoners rode a shorter, thinner board, the Alaia, and

the best of them were backed for large sums of money by the crowds who turned out to watch them, and cheered from the shore during the competitions.

When the kings were riding, nobody was allowed to jeer, but the silence that greeted a poor ride was just as bad.

Captain Cook Discovers Surfing

Right from the start there has been a link between surfing and Australia, for the first white man to see surfboard riding was Captain Cook. He discovered Hawaii in 1778 on one of the series of voyages that led to the discovery of Australia. Sailing into Kealakekua Bay, Hawaii, he recorded his astonishment at seeing the natives swimming happily in the surf and even catching the waves on boards:

The surf, which breaks on the coast around the bay, extends to the distance of about 150 yards from the shore, within which space the surges of the sea, accumulating from the shallowness of the water, are dashed against the beach with prodigious violence. Whenever, from stormy weather or any extraordinary swell at sea, the impetuosity of the surf is increased to its utmost height, they choose that time for this amusement. . . .

Twenty or thirty of the natives, taking each a long narrow board, rounded at the ends, set out together from the shore. The first wave they meet they plunge under, and suffering it to roll over them, rise again beyond it, and make the best of their way by swimming out into sea. The second wave is encountered in the same manner as the first; the great difficulty consisting in seizing the proper moment of diving under it which, if missed, the person is caught by the surf and driven back again with great violence, and all his dexterity is then required to prevent himself from being dashed against the rocks.

As soon as they have gained, by these repeated efforts, the smooth water beyond the surf they lay themselves at length on their boards and prepare for their return. As the surf consists of a number of