

Foreword

The more things change, it has often been said, the more they remain the same. And so it is with the world of surfing, which in some ways has changed enormously in the years since this book was first published in 1966.

A simple device like the ankle-lead, for example, has eliminated the long swims that used to consume half of every surfer's energy and time in the water. And thanks to continuous experiments with board design, maneuvers are possible now that surfers in the mid 1960s could only dream about. Consider the arrival of the "Short Board." Few surfers had seen a board less than nine or ten feet long, the standard length since soon after World War II. And those ten-foot boards had been a great liberation from the unwieldy planks of the 1930s. The boards that began to appear on beaches in the late sixties harked back to a shorter version the early Hawaiians had called *alaia*—seven, six, sometimes five feet long. With these new models came later take-offs, more radical turns, and virtuoso stunts like a 360-degree whirl in the midst of a high-speed ride.

Meanwhile, thanks to the ongoing spirit of adventure, enhanced by the insulating pleasures of the wetsuit, surfers have tried waves along just about every surfable coastline on the planet, from Costa Rica to Bali's Kuta Beach, from Tierra del Fuego to British Columbia and beyond. As both a sport and an industry, surfing is now more internationalized than ever, with a professional circuit and contests staged around the world.

And yet, for all the advances in equipment and technique, certain elemental features haven't changed much at all. The forces that cause inviting swells to hump offshore are the same as they have been for countless millennia—the inexorable push of wind and water. From island to island, from continent to continent, the same reefs still wait submerged. Day after day surfers jockey for position as a wave rises to block out half the sky. They paddle hard and feel the rush and lift of nature's mysterious power, leap to their feet and cut the foamy trail that always disappears behind them. And after all the exploring of the world's many shorelines, Hawai'i continues to be the global headquarters for this ancient sport and pastime.

This was the first book to chart surfing's Pacific origins in the context of Polynesian culture. Its main outline was conceived and developed by Ben Finney as his master's thesis in anthropology at the University of Hawai'i. Much of the material was revised by James D. Houston, who also added new details and interpretations. For this thirtieth-anniversary edition, a number of seldom-seen drawings and early photos have been added, along with appendixes of vintage writings on the subject, from the unedited log of Captain Cook's second-in-command, Lt. James King, to Jack London's lively account of "A Royal Sport," which first appeared in 1907. A few historical and cultural details have been updated (e.g., pronunciation marks for Hawaiian terms and the use of

Polynesian place names, such as Rapa Nui and Aotearoa in lieu of Easter Island and New Zealand), but beyond these, we have decided not to expand the original text. We hope it can be read as a detailed history as well as a view of this sport at a particular moment in its evolution. Thus, our description of catching a wave (pages 16–19) predates the “Short Board” and the invention of the ankle-leash. And our account of surfing’s decline on the outer Hawaiian Islands predates the rediscovery of famous breaks on Maui, Hawai‘i, and elsewhere as the sport continued to spread outward from Waikīkī.

In the mid 1960s surfing in Tahiti seemed a forgotten skill. But then surfers from Australia, California, and Hawai‘i began bringing their boards to Tahiti to surf, intriguing young Tahitians. Some say that the first of them to try modern surfing got their start by buying boards from Australians who needed the money to fly back home. By the 1980s young Polynesians were surfing all around Tahiti and the neighboring islands, and a Tahitian had won the French national surfing championships. Similarly, interest in modern surfing among the indigenous Māori people of Aotearoa exploded with the introduction in the early 1970s of foam and fiberglass boards, which could be cheaply and easily made locally. Māori youth living along the west and east coasts of the North Island took to the waves in great numbers, and since then many have achieved recognition in national and international competition.

As for the early spread from Hawai‘i toward other shores, it dates back a bit farther than we were aware of when we first researched this book. Though George Freeth, who visited Redondo Beach in 1907, still stands as the sport’s first popular ambassador, recent research has uncovered the fact that Hawaiians surfed the shores of Monterey Bay as long ago as 1885.

A trio of Hawaiian princes, nephews of King Kalākaua, were en-

rolled at a military school south of San Francisco. They sometimes spent weekends with a family friend in Santa Cruz, Mrs. Lyman Swan, whose mother was Hawaiian. On July 20, 1885, the following item appeared in a local paper, *The Santa Cruz Daily Surf*, in a column called “Beach Breezes”:

The young Hawaiian princes were in the water enjoying it immensely and giving interesting exhibitions of surf-board swimming as practiced in their native land.

This is the first recorded instance of board-surfing on the West Coast, though not the first word of wave-riding there. That is to be found in Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* (Boston, 1840). Dana was a New Englander who had left Harvard for medical reasons and went to sea on a trading ship bound for California, by way of Cape Horn, in search of cattle hides. The ship’s first West Coast stop was Santa Barbara. It was January 1835. Young Dana was in the first long-boat trying to make the beach, and a heavy winter swell was running. The Americans were worried about capsizing in the shorebreak, when they were shown how to maneuver by a crew from another merchant ship that had recently dropped anchor. These were Hawaiian sailors accustomed to moving canoes through rushing surf:

The sun had just gone down; it was getting dusky; the damp night wind was beginning to blow, and the heavy swell of the Pacific was setting in, and breaking loud and high “combers” on the beach. We lay on our oars in the swell, just outside the surf, waiting for a good chance to run it, when a boat which had put off from the Ayacucho just after us came alongside of us, with a crew of dusky Sandwich Islanders talking and hallooing in their outlandish tongue.