



Photo by Garey Faught

Typical summer day at Zuma's "Free Beach" 2 to 3 foot right, water temp ~58 degrees. Circa 1972

My Paipo Story

I started body-surfing when I was 15 years old at Santa Monica Beach. (Sarrentos, for those of you who remember Santa Monica in the early 1960's) We didn't have much money (if any) and body-surfing was an inexpensive entertainment. Plus we hitchhiked to the beach from Hollywood and hitching with a board would take you hours to get a ride. My first real surfing purchase was a pair of fins, they enabled me to catch waves better and my abilities improved over time. One fine spring day we decided to hitch up the coast to Zuma Beach. There we found a perfect peak with both lefts and rights and long shoulders. In those days Zuma was pretty much deserted, that day there wasn't a sole on the beach, it was breaking three to four feet of crystal clear waves, you could actually see through the waves as they formed. We surfed the "Free" beach at Zuma and fell in love with the spot. The problem was keeping up with the wave; you just never seemed able to keep up with it. The solution was a board and though I had tried board surfing (in fact had a 9'2" Con for awhile) I was just never that proficient at it, plus I loved being at one with the wave. I had seen different clips of belly-boarders in surf films of the day and the idea intrigued me. Actually the speed they reached intrigued me. After serving in the military I returned to civilian life and surfing. Now with a job and a car of my own, it was Zuma every weekend and days off. We became regulars. One day one of the guys had a bellyboard and let me try it. I was hooked and went out and purchased a 48 inch "El Piapo" bellyboard from Val Surf Shop in Van Nuys, California. It was polyurethane core and fiberglass with a single Greenough Stage IV removable fin. This was 1971, I think, and there were just a couple of us belly-boarding at Zuma at that time. What I most like about belly-boarding when they "black balled" board surfers we could still be out there surfing. On bigger days we had many of the waves to ourselves. The big days were 8 feet and above, I remember days with waves topping fifteen feet. There were a select few who would venture out on these days and I include myself among them. I surfed other spots, Newport Beach and Malibu, which was interesting, being that I was the only belly-boarder there; I also surfed various other beaches up and down the Southern California Coast but always had a place in my heart for the peaks of Zuma Beach. I eventually traded my beach life for married life and a family and slowly drifted away from belly-boarding. I finally sold my board while living in Santa Rosa California in 1993 for \$25.00, crazy, they're now selling online for \$175.00 and up. I now live many miles from the beach in Northeastern Oregon, but on cold winter days I can still close my eyes and feel that rush of the wave, the acceleration you feel as the wave grabs you, the view of the shoulder developing before you and that special place in the tube charging along at what seems like 100mph. These are the things I will never forget.