

Paipo - Bellyboarding in Australasia

Riding prone on wood and fibreglass boards in Australia and New Zealand.

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Kit Carson at Winkipop, 1969. Photo courtesy Kit Carson.

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Noosa 1960s - unidentified surfers heading out
Photo by Stuart Scott.



QANTAS-BOAC poster, designed by Hayes c.1956 S. Anthony and O. Green. British Aviation Posters: Art, Design and Flight. Courtesy Philip Zibin.

1 Background

Paipo or papa paepo'o boards have their roots in Polynesia, with the most sophisticated boards and surfing occurring in Hawaii. While, the origins of the word paipo is contested, the first known written use of the word was the logo on Wally Froiseth's 1950's Pai Po boards. Clark (2011) interviewed Froiseth who stated that he coined the term from the word Hawaiians used when they referred to bodysurfing or bodysurfing with a small board - papa pae po'o (to ride a wave head first), shortened in common use to pae po. Farrelly (1965) referred to a thin dished out "peipo" as "The most advanced form of belly board". The word paipo has also referred to boards made around Newport and Huntington Beach, California in the late 1960s-1970s (some of these specifically included paipo in their name: Newport Paipo, El Paipo, House of Paipo, Jacks Huntington Paipo).

The 2004 edition of Matt Warshaw's Encyclopedia of Surfing describes bellyboarding as "all but forgotten" by the mid 1970s. Warshaw did, however, acknowledge that modern surfing techniques and surfboards were influenced by the bellyboard. Richard Kenvin's 2014 book, Surfcraft, well sums up the place of bellyboards in surfing history:

The paipo maintained a link to ancient boards and riding styles while demonstrating, in the midst of the longboard era, that incredible things were possible on thin, flexible boards with little flotation ... the paipo was a testament to the power of pure planing hydrodynamics.

Rod Rodger's paipo forum [My Paipo Boards and... More](#) and more recently a facebook page [Paipo & Bellyboard Riders](#), Tom Wegener's passion and promotion of the alaia and the World Bellyboard championships in the UK have maintained an interest in these boards, which for some didn't need rekindling. Interest is also growing among people who can no longer ride their preferred surfcraft, as a result of age or injury. Paipos are being "rediscovered" and either being ridden in new ways or their potential explored through new technologies and designs. Compared with the history of stand-up boards little has been written about paipo and who made or rode them. Even where there are photos, the surfers are typically not identified. This site tries to record some of the story of these boards, primarily in Australia, but also in New Zealand.

No, just everywhere. Basically, just like you play a guitar ... I might ride 6 feet back in the tube or 10 feet back in the tube. 3 seconds later I might be 40 feet ahead of the curl, maybe 2 seconds after that I might be 10 feet behind it, and 10 feet out in front of the wave. Just depends on the tracks you cut. The board's built more for that type of performance than just speed. You mainly get speed through the turns.

What are the aims of riding a belly board like that? Why a scooped out belly board for a start?

To be as low as possible. The board is 2 inches thick. I wanted to package the overall length and the overall height to be as small as possible.

How long ago did you first make a flexible back scooped out board?

About 1965. I made one at that time. That was the first one I bought to Australia.

Greenough Interview (Quirk 1971).



BELLY BOARDS

Over the past few months, Tracks has received a host of letters asking for photos and details of belly boards available from manufacturers. Belly boarding has undoubtedly received terrific impetus from George Greenough and all the boards shown here feature the "spoon" concept first utilized by George.

Shane	\$65
Ron Wade	\$59
Farrelly	\$80
Bennett	\$67
Wallace	\$79

Tracks Design page (Unknown 1972).

Source: Photos courtesy Tracks magazine.

2 Challenges in documenting the history of paipo boards

In Australia the term bellyboard was used more commonly than paipo. However, in the 1960s and 1970s the term bellyboard was also used to refer to a kneeboard. This can be seen in Andy McAlpine's 1968 film 'Children of the Sun' and in a 'Tracks' magazine interview George Greenough is asked his aims in riding "a scooped out bellyboard" (Quirk 1971). The Design page of the January 1972 issue of 'Tracks' described receiving "lots of letters asking for details of bellyboards" and then referring to Greenough's spoon concept (Unknown 1972).

Greg McDonagh (2009), Bill Wallace (2009), Dick Laycock (2009), Eddie Sawden (2009) and the kneeboarder Lenny Woods (2009) were contacted about their knowledge of bellyboards in Australia. Initially, all thought they were being asked about kneeboards and used the terms interchangeably. Identifying whether a board was made as a bellyboard can also be difficult. Early kneeboards were often below five foot in length resembling a bellyboard while some bellyboards were like shorter versions of stand-up boards. Long paddleboards can be ridden prone while boards designed as bellyboards, may be ridden kneeling or stand-up. Examples of the latter include Wally Froiseth at Makaha circa 1957 and the 1963 footage of Val Ching riding the Wall, Waikiki.



Shane bellyboard resembling an early knee-board.



Andy McAlpine's 'Children of the Sun'.

Source: Shane photo courtesy Mike Brown



Wally Froiseth - stand up paipo..



Bill Wallace bellyboard resembling a short version of a malibu.'

Source: Photos courtesy John Clark and Bob Brown

3 Paipos, bellyboards, lameroos, chestboards - what's in a name?

A variety of boards, from solid wood coffin lid style boards to steamed plywood boards were ridden prone from the early twentieth century onward. The traditional UK style board in its most developed form is a narrow wooden board with parallel rails and notable nose lift. Historically, they were variously known as surf-riders, surf-boards, wave-riders and surf shooters, though now they are usually referred to as bellyboards. Geoff Cater has more referred to these boards as Empire boards because they were ridden in the British colonies including South Africa,

Australia and New Zealand. In Australia and New Zealand these boards were also made available to would-be surfers by beachside guesthouses, such as the Two Bays Guest House in Torquay and Vera Lynn in Lorne (Smith 2009a), and Browne's Accommodation House, Piha, as well being rented from beachside shops, such as McGovern's in Scarborough, Western Australia.



Surfing c. 1920 at Point Lonsdale. Photo courtesy Gary Clist.



Wooden boards. Torquay Surf-world museum.

BROWNE'S ACCOMMODATION HOUSE

Daily Bus, 8/- Return. All Meals obtainable
 11/- Day, £3/10/- Week. Phone Piha Bureau.
 Excellent Table. Electric Light. Tennis Court.

CHILDREN
 Love the shallow warm waters of the lagoon where they can splash about all day long in perfect safety.
 Save Your Benzine. COME TO PIHA.

SURFERS
 Thrill to the long Pacific rollers where beach patrols make for perfect security.
 BRING THE FAMILY TO PIHA.

Safe Bathing!
PIHA

Browne's Guesthouse Ad.

Source: Surfworld and Weekly News-Christmas number.
 October 14, 1940 , page 5.



Old style bellyboards(deck).



Old style bellyboards(bottom).

Source: Bob Smith collection

One style of board was the Paipo Nui, sold commercially in Hawaii by Val Valentine in the mid 1960s and a contemporary version is still made by Paul Lindbergh under the Hawaiian Paipo Design label. These finless, guitar pick shaped boards were developed by John Waidelech and Jim Grownney(2009) in the early 1960s. These boards are finless with low buoyancy. In Australasia, the best examples of this style of board were made in the 1960s by Jamie Farfor in Victoria and Peter White in New Zealand; and more recently in New Zealand by the late Dave Jackman.



This 1962 photo excerpt displays two prominent types of paipo boards. The Australian Women's Weekly, 30(18), 23.

Another prominent design was a twin finned board, with deck handles. John Clark who was in regular contact with Wally Froiseth noted: "Wally made his first Hawaiian Pai Po balsa/fiberglass board in December 1955 with no fins.

This is the board that he loaned to Jimmy Alama that was stolen. He made a second board without fins, but it side-slipped too much, so he added two fins to it, which were too small and in the wrong position. This was early in 1956, and from then on he continued to experiment with materials, designs, and fins until he could ride the boards to his satisfaction. By 1957, he was riding his paipos prone and standing on big days at Waikiki, Makaha, and Sunset" (Clark 2010b). Further, Wally Froiseth advised: "I first put a single fin on one of my paipos, but when I tried it at Makaha, it was too shaky and not steady enough" (Clark, 2010a). John Clark noted: "Traditional paipo boards until after World War II were generally short, narrow, and thin. Wally's boards were longer, about 4'; wider, about 21" in front narrowing to 18" in the tail, and thicker, about 1 1/2" wide. He also glassed the boards and added a handle in the front and twin fins on the bottom. Given all those features, his boards were different than the existing board' (Clark 2010d).



Froiseth "Pai po" logo.



Clymer bellyboard.

Source: John Clark and Mike Brown.



Another take on a twin fin.



twin fin bellyboard.

Source: Photos courtesy Wayne Priestly.

This style of twin finned bellyboard has proved to be influential and made and ridden in Australia since the mid-late 1950s, when this style of board may have been brought to Australia by the US Olympic lifeguard team. This style of board reportedly featured in an early Bud Browne surf movie (Tingle 2009). In Australia these boards were made by the likes of Bill Clymer, Fred Pyke and Rod Sly. Leigh Tingle still rode his board made by Gordon Woods in 1956, into his 70s.

Over the years bellyboards have been referred to by a range of terms. These include half-boards or half-surfboards (Bloomfield 1958), semi-boards (Klein 1965), chestboards (KUK 1963, Tony Wegener 2015), skimboards (Kelly 1965) and the distinctly Australian name, Lamaroo. An unresolved issue concerns the origin of the word Lamaroo (also spelled loomaroo, lumeroo, lumeroo). Lamerero has been used to refer to UK style bellyboards (e.g boards in the Torquay surf museum) as well as to Froiseth style paipo. Regarding the pre-1950s bellyboards there is speculation that the word Lamaroo is derived from "the word laminate as per the making of them with ply laminate" (Smith 2009b). In 1956 Rod Sly, made twin finned balsa boards he has referred to as "lou marou" (Sly 2010). This interview with Sly suggested that "Lou marou" was "perhaps also the name of a coastal steamer". There indeed was a steamer, the Lammeroo, which was sold to a Chinese firm in 1931. However, in 2015, Rod reported Lou was his sister's name and she had suggested the board would ride like a roo (Sly 2015). Larry O'Brien a US paipo rider also suggested the kangaroo link.

Hanging from the ceiling of the Torquay Lifesavers Club (SLSC) is a twin finned balsa board labelled as a 'loomaroo'. Barry Starke (Starke 2011) recalls buying a Clymer "loomaroo, the precursor to the paipo" in 1958 while Cater has suggested Lamaroo "may have derived from product labelling by a commercial manufacturer of the period" (Cater 2009c). Cater (2009c) has also provided an alternative spelling "Looma-Roo" (Goetz 1963). In an e-mail Hayden (Hayden 2010) used the spelling "lumeroo". Vic Tantau also from Victoria produced belllooma boards in the late 1950s so another possibility is that "looma" or "loomer" was a local term referring to waves or board. The 1961 excerpt from the Australian Surfer refers to a broken board being made into a "loomaroo". Overall, the origins of the term lamerero with its different spellings has generated speculation but no real evidence.

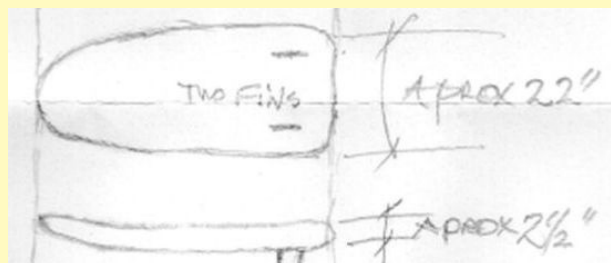


Alan Coulson's twin finned 'Loomaroo'.

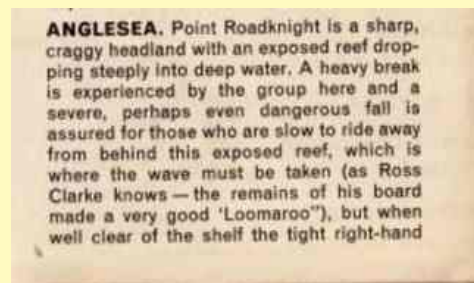


The Lammeroo.

Source: Torquay SLSC and [Lamerero](#)



Rod Sly's Loomaroo.



Ross Clarke's repurposed loomaroo.

Drawing Rod Sly. (Right): Author unknown (1961). The Australian Surfers goes south to Victoria. The Australian Surfer(2).



Tom Wegener - King Island.



Vidler bellyboard WA 2006.

Source: Photos by Sean Davey and Henry Marfleet.

4 The mixed fortunes of bellyboards since the 1950s.

The emergence of bellyboards as higher performance surfcraft was due to several reasons. Without the assistance of surf fins (flippers), this was a time when surfing prone would have largely been restricted to riding white water or catching waves from a shallow point, unless the board could be paddled or the surfer was particularly skilled. The development and manufacture of swim fins enabled surfers to more readily catch and ride critical waves. Swim fins were invented in 1935 by Louis de Corlieu (Marx 1990) and were being used in Hawaii in the 1930s (Clark 2009).

Churchill began selling his swim fins in 1940 (Marx 1990). Dick Turnbull from Bondi produced swim fins in Australia around 1949 (Regan 2010).



Turnbull 'continental' flippers belonging to Pete Berry. 23 x8 x 3kg Photo by Allan Cavanaugh

While swim fins enabled propulsion to catch waves and to get out beyond breaking waves development in materials enabled the production of surfcraft that could be ridden in better waves. In Australia, balsa became generally available for surfboard manufacture in 1958 (Young 1983). Arthur Millner provided manufacturers, such as Bill Clymer with a source of lightweight but relatively strong material to manufacture surfboards and bellyboards (Larkin 2009b). The introduction of foam and fibreglass also allowed more functional bellyboards to be produced. There were also a number of US influences. Regan (2010) recalls that the 1956 US/Hawaiian lifeguard team on their visit to Australia brought two balsa paipo boards with them and that soon after local surfers copied these

boards. The photo below by Regan depicts a board much shorter than the other 'malibu' style boards. Clark (2010b) advises that he spoke with Tim Guard, the president of the Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation who was one of the Hawaii team members. Guard (2011) recalled that he brought a semi-hollow balsa bellyboard made by Joe Quigg which he rode at Manly and Freshwater. This board was left with his host family in Australia.

Early surfing films, such as Bud Browne's 1957 'The Big Surf' which was shown in Australia (Unknown 1972) depicted surfers riding bellyboards in larger Hawaiian waves, while Bruce Brown's 1961 film 'Surfing Hollow Days' featured an unknown Australian bellyboarder riding Waimea Bay. Not only did this suggest how bellyboards could be ridden, but also provided design inspiration (Tingle 2009, Larkin 2009c). A Paipo Nui flyer mentioned a number of other 1960's films that contained paipo surfing ('Locked in', 'The Call of the Surf' and 'For Surfer's only'). In addition to the images shown on the big screen, surfers in the 1960s began making trips to Hawaii and Hawaiian boards were being introduced to Australia. Around the mid 1950's Wally Froiseth had developed fibreglassed balsa, twin-fin paipo boards (Clark 2010 a) while the early 1960s saw the development of the delta-wing guitar-pick shape Paipo Nui boards. Jamie Farfor (2009) was one surfer who began making these more hydrodynamically sophisticated boards in Australia after seeing them being ridden in Hawaii. The use of foam and fibreglass also enabled a myriad of different designs to be made.

Another factor associated with the use of bellyboards has been the banning of finned surfboards from certain areas.

In Sydney this occurred around 1970-1973 (Cater 2009c). 'Tracks' magazine reported receiving lots of letters regarding problems at Bondi in this regard (Stewart 1973) and notably similar bans also occurred at Newport in the United States (Moynier 2010). Coolite boards were among the prone craft ridden to escape these bans. A 1971 letter in Tracks by Joseph Cool (ite) in response to an article on surf mats extolled the virtues of coolite boards.

Cool quoted from the October Tracks article stating both types of surfcraft 'make the rider aware of "the movement of water underneath him, giving the impression that no barrier exists between himself and the water"' (Cool 1971). A more recent reference to Joe Cool-ite was a 2010 letter to Surfing World, describing the surfing of Tony Latham at Maroubra (Wazza 2010): "I vividly remember running down Beach St and seeing a pitching 10 footer exploding out there and Tony suddenly flying out of the tube on his Coolite" (p. 108).

This sensation of being close to the wave, is one that many bellyboarders have experienced and commented on (see Crandall 1970, Carson 2010) and while also experienced by bodysurfers, bellyboarding offered new opportunities for speed and manoeuvrability. For example, Laycock (2009) described bellyboards being based on the surfplane (patented in 1936 by Smithers Ernest E and Richardson, D. Pneumatic surfboard or float. U.S. Patent No. 2,064,128. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (December 15 1936)) motivation being to find something more manoeuvrable. Peden (2010) described riding a bellyboard because as a bodysurfer he was less able to compete with surfers, as designs progressed and boardriding became more popular.

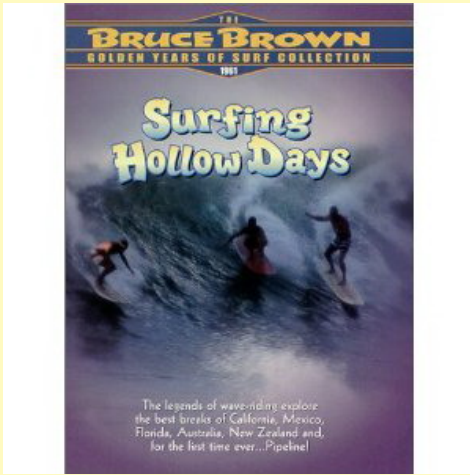


1956 US/Hawaiian lifeguard boards Cronulla SLSC



Paipo Nui-'delta wing' order form.

Source: Photo by Barry Regan, courtesy Garry Birdsall and Bob Smith collection.



Bruce Brown's 'Surfing Hollow Days'.



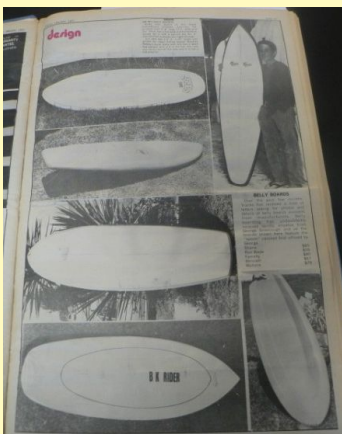
Bennett fibreglass bellyboard.

Source: Board photo Mike Smith.

5 The demise of bellyboarding

Bloomfield suggested that the bellyboard "never had strong appeal, mainly because of the superiority of the full-sized, hollow board; also because the small board has an unpleasant habit of diving abruptly and striking the user a blow in the abdomen with the rear-end" (p.59). Midget Farrelly later took a different view, "I think that peipos are likely to become very popular" (Farrelly & McGregor 1965). Their simplicity and "easy and cheap" construction being two factors that were considered likely to contribute to their popularity. The likely reasons why bellyboards never attained mainstream status are more complex than Bloomfield above suggests. One factor in the demise of bellyboards was the introduction of boogie boards, however, a number of factors probably contributed.

Just as bellyboards were seen by bodysurfers as an improved method of riding waves, the surfing of George Greenough inspired people to try kneeboards. Dick Laycock (Laycock 2009) who worked for the McDonaghs and then Bennett for 30 years acknowledged the influence of George Greenough around 1965-1966 though stated kneeboards were no more popular than bellyboards. Laycock described bellyboards as a specialist item that no one made on a commercial basis and that shapers would "begrudgingly make one". By January 1972 'Tracks' saw it necessary to provide readers with the names of manufacturers from whom "bellyboards" could be purchased (along with board prices), stating that "Belly boarding has undoubtedly received terrific impetus from George Greenough".



Design page.



Morey Boogie advertisement.

Source: Tracks v.15 (January 1972), page 29 and v.61 (Nov. 1975), page 31.

Also, as surfing broke away from lifesaving and surfboards become lighter and thus more accessible, the boom in surfboards was about standing up. Laycock described bellyboards as being treated with a bit of scorn by most people: "they were on the periphery" ridden by people before they could stand up. Laycock stated that he had a

friend Barry Sievers who was taunted with "why don't you learn to stand up". Bellyboards were reported to be treated like "lepers".

On the Gold Coast and around Torquay bellyboarding had faded by the early 1970s. A factor reported by several of the bellyboarders was the advent of the legrope (Carson 2010, Hayden 2010, Taylor 2010). The steep take-off and punishing rocks at locations like Kirra and Winkipop had limited the number of stand-up surfers at these locations, especially when conditions got bigger. Legropes reduced these risks and bellyboarders couldn't compete with standup surfers who could catch the waves earlier. Additionally, with the much longer 12' boards, bellyboarders and surfers did not conflict over the same take-off spot. As boards got shorter at places like Cronulla there were tensions when there was competition for the same critical take-off spot (Regan 2010).



Aden Parsons planing on the body at Little Avalon. May 1964.

For a while Little Avalon was primarily a spot for body-surfers and bellyboard riders.



Same wave from the water.

Source: Photo Pennings, courtesy Dennis Markson; Dennis Markson photo

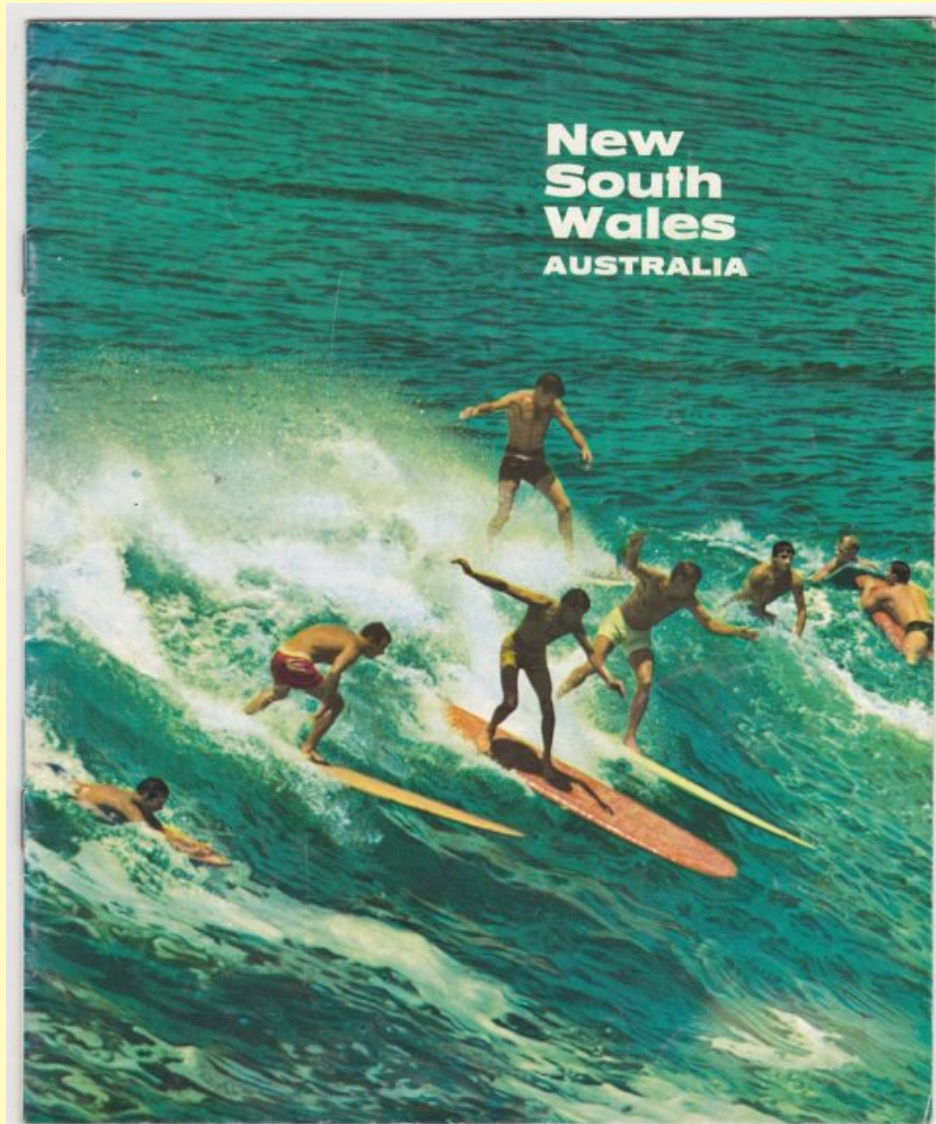
Another factor was the increased popularity of mass produced coolite boards as a transitional form of surfing. In a series of interviews with Tasmanian surfers, Davey (2005) reported that many began surfing on coolite boards.

There is no mention of bellyboards. Around 1970 Dick Ash (2009) produced the bellybogger, a roto moulded hollow plastic board. Ash estimated that he made about 500 of these boards. Sales were good until they were banned from use in the flagged beach area patrolled by lifesavers. The Morey Boogie was introduced and Ash gave up producing the bellybogger until 1994. Another competitor for riding prone was surf mats. Numerous full page advertisements appeared in 'Tracks' magazine from 1974-1975. Free 'n Easy advertisements in issues 48 and 49 featured Rabbit Bartholomew and Peter Townsend, while Gerry Lopez was featured with an O'Neill mat. Other brands of surf mats, usually marketed on a full page included Merrin's, Hodgeman, RipCurl and Palma.

Advertisements for surf mats after April 1975 became less frequent. The October 1975 issue featured the O'Neill 'Super Mat' followed the next month by an advertisement for the "1 1/2 pound foam miracle" the Morey Boogie.

Dale Solomonson, who later made Neumatic surf mats provided an endorsement for the boogie board: "For amazing freedom and speed". Elsewhere in this advertisement, no doubt with competitors in mind, the reader finds the line: "For the real feeling of surfing fast, finless and flexible".

Peter Bowes in a post to [Kurungabaa](#) has provided insight into riding prone on a surfplane as well as what it was like surfing in the 1950s: Bowes, Peter (2009): "THE RIDE IN Unlike today's surfing etiquette, where only one man has the right of possession of a wave, fifty years ago it didn't matter who was where, in fact the more who were able to crowd together on the very lip of a top to bottom breaking wave the better. Especially if the wave had some size, because from this lofty crag the route to shore could be better planned. For instance; five boys are poised on the precipice of a six foot wall of water that is about to rear up and collapse onto the sandbank, and in the few seconds available they are individually able to string together a logical and related series of moves that would rival the game plan of a chess master. The inner sandbank was of course crowded with swimmers either too cautious to go beyond their depth, too inexperienced to tackle the dangerous breaking surf, or who were simply in a hasty retreat and trying to get out of the way. Whatever, young or old, now they were legitimate targets. The proper technique to get up sufficient killer approach speed was for the surfplane rider to deny fear and lean down over the lip and wait for the momentum of the wave to pitch the him down the vertical face into a long and fast glide that accelerated him well in front of the explosion of whitewater that always followed. This was where subjective target consolidation became critical, given the victim rich environment that presented itself. Ricochets were much prized, as was the rare double-knock – where more than one rider hit the same floundering wallower. Happily the choices were endless and at times a low growl could be heard amongst the roar of the sea as the young attackers homed in on their prey. Over there, a group of adolescent girls squealing with mock fright and trying to keep their hair dry, girls who had never bothered with fourteen year-old boys, until now. Behind them an overweight man desperately waddling away from the fast approaching mass of whitewater, a quality target indeed



NSW Tourist brochure. Bellyboard at left and surfplane at right. Photo courtesy Gary Clist

and one that was sometimes the objective of more than a few of us, as we converged towards him with a sharklike hunger, a killing pack. To the left a loving couple uncoupling their embrace far too late, then coupling again as the drama of the moment became evident – Two in the one hit. A roar from the crowd! And of course there was always the chance of running down a mate who was trying to get back out for another sortie, and grabbing his surfplane on the way through, a fair trophy. So here was the very early breeding pool of the first generation of modern surfers, not unlike the dozens of snowy haired kids who infest our beaches today; all playing out there in seas that make fools of the weather forecasters, bewilder the sports columnists and frighten their parents”.

6 Today

The decline in use of bellyboards isn't just about boogie boards and the story of bellyboarding is not just about the past but has relevance to the present because bellyboards continue to be made and ridden. In a recent discussion between Andrew Kidman and the US shaper, Dave Parmenter, Parmenter advised: " Be interested in everything. Try every surfboard you can get your hands on. If it's a modern Alaia, a Paipo board, a bodyboard. I rode every single surfboard I could get my hands on. I was always interested in it, and I've never been incurious about them" (Kidman 2010, page 50). Never likely to be the next best thing, bellyboards / paipo boards continue to be ridden, for a range of reasons, but the main reason is that they are fun.



Rocky Hall and Jeff Callaghan - Winki.



Kit Carson.

Source: Photo courtesy Kit and Kerry Carson



Kit Carson and Jeff Callaghan -Torquay.



Bryan Hayden.

Source: Photo courtesy Jeff Callaghan and Bryan Hayden.