

New South Wales: Cronulla and south



'Trapped inside: a surfer about to go over the 'falls' while Ken Williams drops down the face of a big wave at Cronulla Point, NSW'. Paul 'Bear' Burrige identified himself as the inside surfer riding a cut down broken mal.



Barry Hutchins at Garie- c1965.

Sources: Photos Margan, F. and Finney, B.F. (1970). A pictorial history of surfing. Paul Hamlyn, London and Rick Shapter.

1 Cronulla

Sydney is Australia's most populated city and a major commercial centre as well as the only capital city with proximate, reliable surf. It is therefore not surprising that it would be a centre of surfing activity and manufacturing. From at least the late 1950s bellyboards were being ridden around Cronulla. Barry Regan photographed team boards 1956 US/Hawaiian lifeguard team visit, though unfortunately the fin area isn't visible in the bellyboard in the photo. Regan (2010) recalled Lloyd Webster, Ronnie Bowler, Neal Stenhouse and Nigel Dwyer taking up bellyboards after seeing the balsa boards of the visiting team. However, Dwyer(2024) only recalls riding a finless balsa board around 1959-1960 and that it was possibly made by Graham Ferris. Another photo from this period was taken in 1958, on an Avoca surf trip. The bellyboard in the photo was reported by Garry Birdal as belonging to Ray "hitcho" Hitchensen.



US-Hawaiian team boards at Cronulla, 1956. Courtesy Barry Regan.



(a) Ray Greenaway and Garry Birdsall, Avoca surf trip 1958.



(b) Garry Birdsall and John Day.

Source: Photo Ray Hitchensen, courtesy Garry Birdsall.

In the 1960s, waves of surfers, would experiment with both solid wood and plywood paipos. These were typically ridden by young teenagers who would later progress onto riding kneeboards or standup boards. Dr. Barry Hutchins (Hutchins 2009a,2009b) produced bellyboards from 1963-1966. He estimated that he made about 40 boards. The initial boards appeared to be short versions of longboards but later boards were shorter and less derivative of long boards. Innovations included step-bottoms and three finned boards. These were mostly custom boards made of redwood and balsa. Over time the fins on these boards changed from D-style fins to more raked fins which were found to be more manoeuvrable. Hutchins continued to surf into the 1970s but production ended after he was called up for National Service in 1966.



Hutchins three finned board



Hutchins personal board.

Source: Photos courtesy Barry Hutchins



Hutchins single fin.

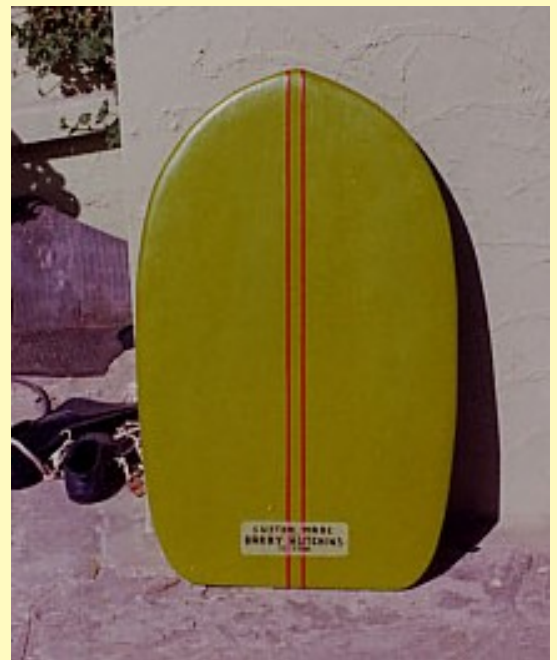


Hutchins twin fin.

Source: Photo Barry Hutchins



(a) 1965 4' x 22" tri-fin.

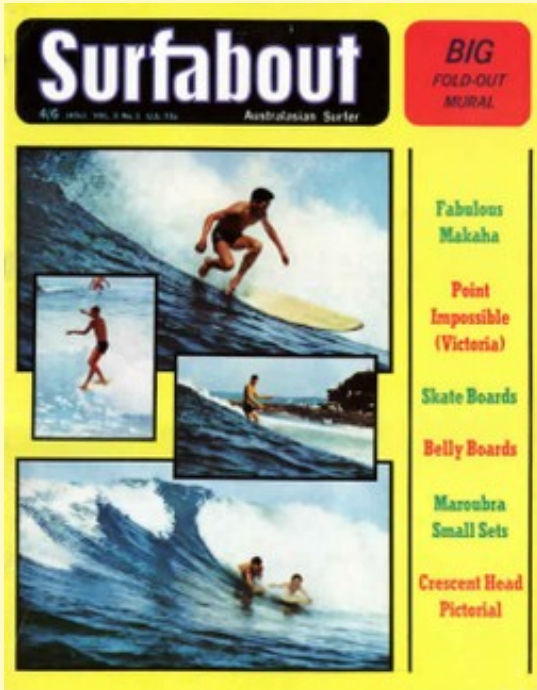


(b) Hutchins logo

Source: Photos courtesy Barry Hutchins

Lewis Cawsey recalls making his own boats and made his own paipo board. His mate Greg Vaughan bought a twin finned bellyboard from school friends. Swim fins came from the Bob Frazer Sports Store in Cronulla, near the theatre. Greg's board had a laminated wood resin finish while Lewis' board was varnished marine ply. He wrote: "Mine had a little bit of flex in it. It's what I liked about the design. What happens, under the nose I had a slow

curve up to the front edge which is still quite solid and then in the middle of the deck of the board you dish it out with a sander down to the next layer of ply. Dishing out the top allowed the board to flex. The profile shape I like, is similar to the one I have at home now . They're not really rounded and they're not a point either, but there is a soft curve. It tapers slightly on the sides and the back corners are a 3" curve and rounded". Lewis' board was also used as a skim board. Lewis rode his board from 1963 to 1965 before moving onto a mal.



Lewis Cawsey and Greg Vaughan. Cronulla Point.

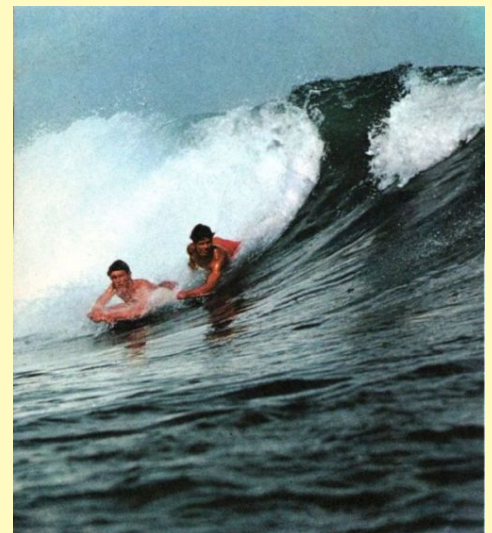


Lewis and Greg. Cronulla Point.

Source: Surfabout Vol 3(1) 1965. Photos courtesy Al Hunt.



A paipo board that Lewis Cawsey made for his boys, ca. 1980. This board is not dished out on top and measures 37-1/2 by 21 inches, tapered.



Greg and Chris Cramey with hand plane

Sources: Photo Lewis Cawsey and Margan and Finney. A Pictorial history of surfing (1970).

Also included in this article are photos of Rick Shapter and Julie Gibson bodysurfing (Shapter 2010).



Above: Face contorted with concentration, this rider comes down the face of the wave — his board obscured by the foam.



Left: The thrill of belly boarding can be seen on the expressions of these two young lads as they speed down a mountainous wave face.

At Waimea, Hawaii, on some of the big-wave days, these boardriders can be seen free falling so fast that they skip down the face of the wave in the manner of a stone ricocheting across a pond.

To be a successful belly board rider, one must be a strong swimmer and in top physical condition. It really takes stamina to be a belly board rider.

In the not too distance future, these boys who excel in belly board riding will form into clubs and enter competition with and against the recognised surfboard riders. **Surfabout** feels this could be quite a departure from accepted procedure, and would appreciate readers' views on this subject, belly board riders v. surfboard riders — why not? Nothing but good can come out of joining forces and exploring the different facets that are open to all in the field of surfing.

Girls, too, are taking kindly to mat riding — one notable fem in the sport is Candy Calhoun, of America, who has become an expert in this phase of surfing.

So, it's out with belly boards, boys and high tail it to the nearest big wave centre.



Above: Belly boarding is not strictly for the boys as this lass shows. A fin can be seen on her right hand as she skims down the wall.

Right: Thrilling is the word for this sport as this youngster, complete with fins, shoots down on his belly board.

Bottom Right: A swirl of spray, a crashing wave, a belly board — man, that's really living.



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A semi-DIY approach to these boards were the paipo kits developed and sold by Len Hedges. Hedges, a naval architect marketed his paipo kits in issues of *Surfing World* (Hedges 1965, Hedges 1966). Steve Core (Core 2010) recalls Hedges regularly coming into Ken 'Geronimo' Beavan's Dee Why Surf Shop at Rockdale (near Cronulla). Beavan would then distribute the kits to his chain of seven Dee Why stores. These boards ranged in length from 27' to 35" and were twin finned. Core recalled the kits included a "sealed plastic page", the board, fins, a container with assembly items and a printed instructions. Hedges was a friend of Ray Ryan, who recalled surfing with Hedges in a dory which was equipped with a sail.



Len Hedges bellyboard kits. *The Surfing World*, 1966. Courtesy Gary Clist.

Cronulla attracted innovators and eccentrics. Bob Griffiths (2010) recalls Weldon Dines (Mr Wells) surfing with twin hand planes as well as a strap on fibreglass belly board. He described this as a "bit like a turtle shell". Dines would surf out at the infamous Shark Island on this board. Ryan recalled that one handplane was like a disc whereas the other, used on the leading arm had a trailing fin. Daryl Sykes (2024): "Len Hedges ... boat builder, occasional surfer. Several of us did our time grinding his concrete boat hulls in the yard at Kurnell. I crewed for him on a ketch delivery from Sydney Harbour to Shoalhaven on the south coast. A very kindly and entertaining guy. Wells...Weldon Dines, sometimes called Weldon Dion. He used large alloy hand planes. My recollections of him were that he showed up for the big swells. He was fearless. Nice guy too."

Waves of paipo surfers came and went, often unfamiliar with those who came before or followed them. Many started out as bodysurfers. Rick Shapter rode one of Barry Hutchins boards while Bob Griffiths (2010) recalls Jeff Rowe and Barry Darby riding bellyboards at Cronulla. Ray Ryan added Dave Croft, Geoff Bird, Adam Plate (Ryan 2010), Jeff Day and Mark Munro (Ryan 2023), while Rolf Meyer (2023) added Bernard McNally. Paul 'Bear' Burrige and Mark Munro also mentioned Jeff 'Oke' Day. Daryl Sykes (2024) recalled Peter Ebbeling, the MacNalley brothers and Steve Aprilovic (Gomez). Ryan said bellyboards were known as paipo around Cronulla and that they became "extinct" around 1966, with some transitioning to kneeboards. Steve Core from Cronulla recalled bodysurfers and paipo at Shark Island before the advent of shortboards. Core's father ran the cinema at Bondi and he briefly rode a Norm Casey bellyboard (the board was about 4'11" with a 1/2" redwood stringer and possibly shaped by Trevor Pollard) before he could afford a surfboard. The board was stored behind the screen at the cinema and he had quick surfs while the movie was being screened.



Casey bellyboard



Casey bellyboard.

Source: Photo courtesy Mike Brown.



(a) Cronulla area bellyboard.



(b) Cronulla area bellyboard.

Source: Photo Chris Stroh. <http://bodyboardmuseum.com.au/>

Shapter was making a replica of his old board. The board is constructed of plane sawn, Western Red Cedar that was doweled and glued. Once completed the board will be finished with 6oz fibreglass cloth and will have a pair of twin fins added (Shapter 2011). Reference in the above article is also made to a 'Bozo' Griffiths, who Bruce 'Fox' Hennessy has identified as Lloyd "Bozo" Griffiths who surfed at Blue Bay and Avoca (Hennessy 2011). Griffiths (2012) has clarified that he was in fact riding a kneeboard. Increasing crowds at local point breaks inspired him to get a kneeboard so he could catch waves further inside and get more waves. Griffiths' board was about 5' and fibreglass, bought from Danny Bond, a local maths teacher. For 1960s footage from Cronulla see Pete Berry's footage of kneeboard & prone surfing



Shapter's unfinished Hutchins replica bellyboard



Unfinished Hutchins replica bellyboard

Source: Photos courtesy Rick Shapter

For many, the mainstay was the home-made board. Munro (2024) credits Dave Croft, with moving from the solid wood boards to lighter and more flexible plywood boards.



Dave Croft



Dave surfing Cronulla

Source: [Cronulla - South Coast Surfing 1960s](#) by Steve Cohen. Photo courtesy Jeff Day



1960s Cronulla paipo owned by Wayne Munro.



Source: Photos courtesy Mark Munro



Jeff, First Reef Cronulla Point. Photo courtesy Jeff Day



Jeff, Cronulla Point lefts.



Jeff, Inside Reef floater - 1967.

Source: Photos courtesy Jeff Day



Kev, Cronulla Point lefts



Kev, Cronulla Point.

Source: Photos courtesy Jeff Day



Jeff, First Reef - wearing the biggest flippers available: "Gi-ants"



Daryl Sykes going left at First Reef.

Source: Photos courtesy Jeff Day



Ron or Peter Mcdougall



Don, Second Reef Cronulla Point.

Source: Photos courtesy Jeff Day



Jeff, Cronulla Point "Bum stand". Photo courtesy Jeff Day



Paul 'Bear' Burrige



Paul 'Bear' Burrige.

Source: Photo by Dave Shaw, courtesy Paul Burrige

Jim McNamara and his mates, including Peter McClellan, got their hands on a bellyboard, which was shared around. Cronulla is near the airport and the board had been brought from Hawaii by a Qantas pilot. It was built from 3 or 4 pieces of rosewood and glassed, with a pair of twin fins. A friend of McNamara's worked in refrigeration and McNamara shaped a board from refrigeration foam, which he had glassed by Terry Atkinson at Gordon and Smith. McNamara rode this single finned board around Cronulla and the south coast, before moving onto a kneeboard in the late 70s. Few made this transition from wood to foam. Ryan couldn't recall any bellyboard riders as making the transition to fibreglass boards or kneeboards which became increasingly common in the the late 1960s to early 1970s (Ryan 2010).



Jim McNamara's foam board. Photo Jim McNamara



Graham King bellyboard. Photo Henry Marfleet.

In the 1980s, Anthony O'Neill from Emerald surfboards in Taren Point made some bodyboard style boards.



Photos Matt Lockwood and Silvana Miles.

2 South coast

Around Austinmer, Stephen Laws makes Mako bellyboards and rides them with friends. He made his first board in 2012 and notes "The most versatile and fastest are the wider ones out to 22 1/2 to 23. The narrower and thinned down ones are more in the pocket sucky waves".



Mako bellyboards.



Mako bellyboards.

Photos courtesy Stephen Laws.



Stephen Laws test riding.



Stephen Laws test riding.

Photos courtesy Stephen Laws: <https://www.facebook.com/Mako-Bellyboards-972144362824784/>.



Mako bellyboards.



Mako bellyboards.

Photos courtesy Stephen Laws.

Terry Gallagher, described in promotional material (Ash 1994) as bellyboarding around Kiama from the early 1960s. Cater (2009c) advised that Gallagher reported that his first board shaped from maple was approximately 3.5 feet long, 1/2-3/4 inch thick, with minimal nose lift and fibreglassed with two fins. More recently, Adam Williams and mates ride paipo, as well as mats and kneeboards around the south coast. In the first photo below is, from left: Blue bell - a hybrid cross paulownia eva rubber paipo. It is 4' 8" with no rocker. Adam shaped "... the edge bottom with bevel edges to allow plenty of release & drift, full concave from nose to tail and the side cut allows more water to release and when on edge the tail will bite more. I have kept a sharp edge on the whole rail with the 10 mm eva bevel sanded to form the rail, nice stick and enjoyed riding this morning compared to the striped belly board". The striped board is 4'8" board from Dsn Surfboards.



A mixture of wood and fibreglass boards.



Adam riding a Peter Harrington Squid Stix.



Skim board, Hubbard inflatable boogie, cork boogie 2 x Bellyboggers.



All timber paipo, double hand planes and an Alaia.

Photos courtesy Adam Williams.



Adam on wooden paipo.



Adam riding a laminate pine board.

Photos courtesy Adam Williams.



Justin Spittle wooden paipo



Justin Spittle in the curl.

Photos courtesy Adam Williams.



Surf Empire paipo by Michael Saggus.



Spoon.

Photos courtesy <https://surfempire.com/> and Adam Williams.



Deano's Michael Mackie board.



Deano's Michael Mackie board.

Photos courtesy Adam Williams.

Fibreglass bellyboards have been made and ridden around Bawley Point by John Kovar (Malaroo): **John surfing the point** Originally from Sydney Sydney, Kovar first made a bellyboard around 1992 from a broken long board and continued to experiment with various bottom, rail and fin configurations. Kovar has reported selling a number of boards in the local area and in Wollongong (courtesy of David and Dianne Guy). He made boards under the Malaroo surfboards label: <http://surfboardgeometry.blogspot.com.au/> .



John Kovar.



Malaroo bellyboard.



Malaroo - concave bottom.



In the barrel

Source: Photos courtesy John Kovar.

The pink board belongs to Dianne Guy and was based on a previous board by John Kovar, but shaped by Raw Surfboards in Wollongong. The artwork is Dianne's design. The fins are also her choice of colours and custom made by Andy Johnson of Black Diamond Surfboards. David's blue board is a streamlined version of the green board above, to make it a bit quicker more manoeuvrable. David's board feature's John's super concave. John had half shaped the board and David finished the board off, which was glassed by Raw. He reports that it is "very fast, responsive and hangs on in the steepest waves"



Dianne Guys 39" board.



Dianne Guys 39" board

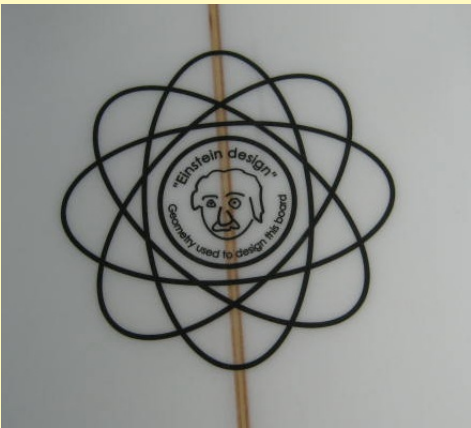


David Guy's 39" board, with super concave.



David Guy fin set-up

Photos courtesy David Guy



Malaroo - logo



John Kovar, Dianne and David Guy