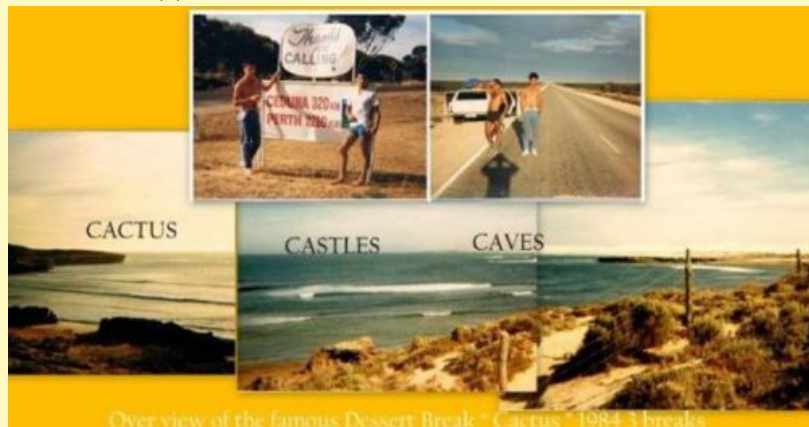(a) Parsons Beach with bellyboard, early 1960s.

(b) Kev McMannus's travels took him west.

Source: Photos courtesy John Arnold and Kev McManus.

John Arnold was a South Australian surfboard manufacturer who made a number of balsa twin fin bellyboards (a style first seen in Australia after 1956) and later a concave bottom, single fin. Arnold was reported to have made a few of these finned concave bellyboards in the 1960s (Brown 2009). Brown (2010) rode a Bennett bellyboard at the age of 14, over the period 1964 - 1967, before exclusively surfing a longboard. Brown surfed the Mid-Coast and around Victor Harbour. A similar transition has been reported by Taylor (Taylor 2010) who surfed his brother's home-made fibreglassed maranti board. The board was about a 1.5 metres long and used when the surf was really hollow. Taylor rode this board for about four or five years before riding stand-up boards.

Tim Fatchen rode the board on the left (above) which he purchased in 1968. He rode the board mostly from 1968-1971, but up until the late 1990s. It was surfed around Port Elliot (Horseshoe bay and Boomer) and Goolwa, but also on holiday to Portland (Portland Bay when it had a beach), Apollo Bay and the Port Macquarie area. Tim advised that "The most exhilarating were shorebreak waves on a moderate to steep beach: Boomer and Horseshoe Bay toward the point as respectively the best and the most lethal–one couldn't resist the temptation to ride a 10-footer at Horseshoe Bay for the lure of actually getting a tube and the betting that you could still pull out of the wave before it dumped. Longer shorebreaks like Laurieton gave longer rides but much less excitement. Laurieton to Pt Macquarie and also Goolwa Beach I would try for the break on the outside bar, though that required flippers and at Goolwa especially, the shore drift would end you up miles away from where you started paddling. So a lot

(a) Twin fin bellyboards. Board on the right is by John Arnold. The board on the left has a Four Point Surf Club sticker.

(b) John Arnold bellyboard logo.

Source: Photos courtesy 'Red Robo'.

of time wasted in walking back to your stuff....My son used the board for Year 9 camps on Yorke Peninsula about 1992, to my envy, and certainly surfed Pondalowie and shorebreaks north of it."

The board could be ridden without flippers: " If the break was shallow enough to push off the bottom, my flippers (floating) were both a nuisance and almost guaranteed to stay behind. I used flippers where I wanted to get out to the first bar, or in big surf with too much depth–I wasn't interested in starting off in white water, I always wanted to get moving as the wave formed, and until I grew older and wiser (cowardly), the bigger the better. Pushing-off bottoms were fast to wade out to and fast to jump the wave. With fins, I'd start catching the wave more-or-less where a standup board would start, to pick the momentum up. In both cases, once moving, I tried to get both knees bent and out of the water, body fully on the board with no drag. Woe betide when my balance was off and the board's nose went in...it stopped dead and I kept going, usually in a somersault".

"I found very early on that the sort of jump start I'd do with a Coolite board, with the balsa board would send me shooting straight out in front of the wave, where the board would stall and the wave try to kill me as it came down. The fact that the board was properly responsive and steerable was the biggest and best bonus from having a proper board, compared to the Coolite things, and of course the speed came with the turns. But with the Port Elliott-style shorebreaks, there was usually only time for one turn, of course".

"The handle was hang-on only. For some reason, all I can remember is turning to the right. So the left arm was crooked in front of the handle, with the elbow crook nestling the point of the handle, and the right arm out pointing along the wave (feet in the air, flippered or not).At the start of a jump, I'd be holding the board both edges, jump and shuffle the body onto it using balance to turn and get the arms as said. Flipper start, I'd already be balancing on the board, so most of the board submerged, and use both arms and flippers to paddle start–as speed increased and the board came up to plane, arms came in and balance started the turn, then flippers out and down along the wave. The emphasis on balance is the explanation as to why the board would try to cut me in half abdominally in a jump start if I got it wrong, or in a flipper start, send me over the top while the board stayed behind. Incidentally, it did take some getting used to at first that the board needed speed to lift you, the buoyancy of the Coolites or later foam boogie boards was simply just not there.

(a) The board on the left ridden by Tim Fatchen and was likely made later.

(b) "Speeding for shore on a bellyboard, JohnArnold."

Source: Photos courtesy 'Red Robo'and Margan, F. and Finney B.R. (1970).

John Arnold twin fin bellyboard. Photo 'Red Robo'.

John Arnold bellyboard c1963/64. Mike Brown collection.

(a) 1960s cutdown Hayden mal believed to be from SA.

(b) 1960s cutdown Hayden mal (4'5.5" x 20") believed to be from SA

Source: Photos courtesy Gary Clist collection.

Leigh Tingle lived in South Australia for four years, from 1969, surfing around Victor Harbour. He is also featured in a 1963 Surfabout article surfing Boomer Beach (Waldeck 1963). Nat Young described Boomer Beach as being like Newport Wedge (Young 1986), so it would have been well suited to a paipo. Lifesavers also rode bellyboards around Moana (Unknown 1961).

Leigh Tingle at Boomer Beach. Surfabout 1963.Photo J Arnold

(a) Burford bellyboard: 4' 4 1/4" x 19 1/2"
x 2".

(b) Burford bellyboard: 4' 4 1/4" x 19 1/2" x 2".

Source: Photo courtesy Wayne Gurney.