

# The Days We Swam

*Changing expectations in Scotland*

Midnight Soho in London's West End is like a zombie apocalypse—needles in the alleys washed with puke. It sets the perfect scene to make us put the pedal down, compass set firmly north, on that bastard-long road by night. Familiarity never eases the contours of the graveyard shift, travel companions dozing like they're drugged, the same track on repeat mile after mile. This trip, as it transpired, held none of the promises expected. It was a lesson in adjusting preconceptions, embracing change, and finding joy in the unanticipated.

We'd hit the road for Thurso's whisky-hued inside section, remembering a similar November chart and glorious, rifling emptiness. The only problem was, so had everyone else. What we found at the end of the road (excitedly stealing glimpses through the castle, the silence of anticipation and memories of tubes gone by) was a collection of crumbly closeouts with forty eager attendees. There were also judging pagodas riffling in the wind, a hundred vans, and speakers blaring bad music. Competition scene. Edgeland firmly humanized.

It once was that this unique spot (and its ugly sisters at Brimms) would suck in any infrequent crowd, leaving the rest of the north coast a happy hunting ground of rivermouth peelers, wedges, and a few mean slabs. Now each has an attendant crew, seeking solitude, wrestling with the uncomfortable truth that we're squeezed onto our small island of 64 million people like lemons in a vice.

As we cursed the multitudes of identical others (like flipping off the mirror), Jack Johns, well known for his reckless exploits in waves of consequence, guided us straight into a boiling, twisting left. The lonely

shoreline upon which we landed was the end product of us weighing the perfection/emptiness scale and falling hard on the latter. Full of fury this wave, beautiful in its own way, a dense little lump of reef. With a quiver of boards for right points, I opted to lie down.

A roll of the dice later, an abandoned croft, a roaring campfire under a daybright moon, a mouthful of rich Dalwhinnie, and it was agreed: decision well made, room for the head to breathe. And the wave beneath—concentrated power.

The low tracks north and the no-exit left starts throwing up flickering rights. Black water and an immense northern horizon, all sea. "It's a massive shorebreak," Josh Vyvyan laughs maniacally, "onto rock." But there's a pit before it shuts down. Jack turns into a mechanical tube fiend, collecting scalps, hunting the thickest ones, traveling.

Walking out along a jut of land we scare up a tawny owl. In the track of its panicked flight, a little right point fights the wind. Josh races the hollow section, his lanky frame swooping into the micro tubes "like a giraffe in a cereal box," as he puts it. Then it really goes flat, but Jack spots a window at an exposed finger of rock. It's a long hike.

We don fins and bob in the dark water, trying to spook each other about Orcas, trying not to get compound fractures from the mean little bowls. The water is translucent, dancing with a livid brilliance. And somehow this session, chest-high at best, holds the greatest significance. This is the feeling I came for and what I hold onto—the joy of the lonely and unusual, the psychedelic swirl of the Cairngorms seeping into my system.

—DANIEL CROCKETT

## Confirmation of Commitment

Distance paddler, big-wave surfer, and enviro-activist  
Jeff Denholm

When I meet Jeff Denholm at Haleiwa Joe's, he's attempting to describe what it's like to paddle through triple-overhead surf with just one arm. "At Hailu yesterday it took me three tries to get through the first reef close outs," he says. "But paddling is paddling. On the third try, I made it out the back and managed to score a solid one."

Denholm lost his arm on a fishing trawler, an accident that also nearly cost him his life at the age of 27. Afterward he created a strict training program, then designed and built his own prostheses, employing a variety of unique models that would suit each of his interests—paddle boarding, surfing, free-diving, skiing, and mountain biking. After 10 years in re-adaptation, physical therapy, and training, he entered his first Molokai

to Oahu paddleboard race. He finished on his remaining arm alone when his prosthesis failed and became unglued. Then he completed three more races in the following years.

"I did it," he says, "and confirmed my commitment. But long-distance paddleboard racing is too hard on my body with just one arm. I'll use myself up, and all I really want to do is paddle into the biggest waves I possibly can. Last week I surfed Jaw's for the first time. It was solid 15-feet plus, medium-sized for Jaws. I caught and rode one, got sucked over the falls, and rescued by a ski. Then I got caught by the biggest set of the day. You could say I tried a bit of everything on the menu."

Denholm has lived in Santa Cruz since 2007 and become a regular face at Maverick's. He also has a long background with several global and local environmental causes, including working as an ambassador for Save the Waves and Patagonia. As the owner of a business that leases fire engines to the United States Forest Service, he became even more focused on activism when he learned of the toxicity issues common with the flame retardant formulas generally used to fight forest fires.

According to Denholm, there are several EPA-banned substances



TIM DAVIS

contained in the traditional red retardant, namely ammonias and nitrates, poisons that have dire effects upon the eco-system, the water table, and the firefighters themselves. Fish turn belly-up when exposed to the substance. The toxic compounds also seep into streams, and eventually end up in the ocean, affecting animal life, sea-life reproduction, as well as being highly toxic to humans.

While considering solutions to this problem, Jeff bounced his concerns about the retardants off

Patagonia's Head of Environment, climber and environmental activist Rick Ridgeway. Ridgeway suggested Jeff do the research, create a business plan, and find the financing for product development. As a result, Jeff decided to found Atira Systems, where he got to work on creating an ecologically safe retardant.

The need for a modern solution was drastic: after 4 years of severe drought in the Western U.S., 2.5 million gallons of pure toxic retardant were dumped in the state of California alone in 2015. When mixed with water—at a solution of about 5 percent retardant to one gallon of treated water—that calculates to more than 50 million gallons in a single year.

As an alternative, Atira Systems developed a retardant that suspends water molecules in a biodegradable gel that adheres to vertical surfaces and washes away with seasonal rains or hosing. CalFire has adopted the technology and is currently in the process of working with Atria to integrate it with their equipment and train firefighters throughout the organization in its use. Beyond the U.S., the international potential for this retardant to have a positive affect is also enormous, considering the global implications of global warming upon wildfires: Last year more than 3,000 miles of Australia burned, while more than 8,000 miles of Indonesia smoldered and blazed for months.

Back on the North Shore however, at least for the moment, Denholm is tracking some of his less altruistic (though possibly masochistic) water-born interests. "We're gonna go check Phantoms," he says. "It might glass off near dark."

—MARA WOLFORD

## Chris Ward

As witnessed by  
Tanner Gudauskas

The El Niño run this winter had me feeling kind of nostalgic. I don't remember how old I was during the last El Niño, maybe 10 or 11. The storms blew out the Uppers river mouth and there was this big tree that got washed into the lineup. And it started gathering a lot of sand and for about a week the sand bar was as good as it could get. It was like Rincon out there. So one afternoon the conditions were dreamy—the sun was shining behind the waves giving them that green glow. And I remember Chris Ward taking off way up at the top. The wave would stack and the current would cause the face to grow, like it does at the Superbank. And Wardo was on a fish getting two or three barrels a wave, just absolutely tearing it. He would carve, kick-stall, and stuff it.



SHAWN PARKIN

I was in the cove, still learning to surf, getting all fired up watching him. There weren't any waves more

than head-high but it was so rad. Wardo was the best in town at that time, and still is, and seeing him get

world-class waves and conditions in San Clemente was a guru moment that I can't forget.

## SPIN THE GLOBE

### Just Dyin' to Meet Chu

XXL-class waves are strewn throughout the Seven Seas.

They're found in Southern Australia, the Eastern Pacific, and Western Europe. Near the Cape of Good Hope. Breaking over high spots on the offshore banks. Yet, as this edition of S the G confirms, they're also present in more surprising waters.

While we don't generally associate this landmass with size, a quick glance at

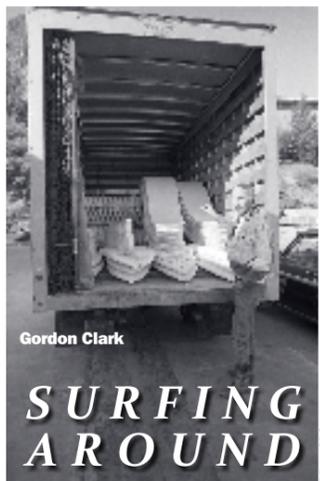
the chart sets you straight. With a broad swell window and an open roadstead reaching well past 3,000 nautical miles, there's little doubt that this limestone reef has seen its share of jumbo days.

Photographer Mike Killion captured this image on February 9, 2016, and conservatively estimates the size at 20 feet. Now why don't you go ahead and estimate where, exactly, he found it. (Answer on inside back flap.)



JOHN BARTON

Bintang-related Indo antics, Volume III. Submitted for your approval? A log-to-board transfer by Harry Bryant at E-Bay, the Mentawais.



### Words of Induction

Clark Foam under Gordon Clark's reign provided the core material for a vast majority of the world's surfboard production in an unprecedented run lasting from 1959 to 2005. Technically, during that entire span, his product and service allowed little if any competition in his key markets. Clark attuned his methods and processes to both his and his customer's needs to serve them in ways that were totally original and brilliant. That he grew rich doing it should come as no surprise. It was said that his blank prices changed daily according to the cost of what he shipped that day. To accomplish that he designed an algorithmic formula that maintained his target margin in spite of complex and variable cost factors. His product and service were compelling enough that as long as the cost of his foam

remained in the ballpark the customers did too.

Among the surfboard builders he served he was largely appreciated and respected as an innovative customer-oriented partner. He would analyze the needs across the board of his family of shapers and develop practices that served them in ways that were hard for them to depart. Every now and then, one of them would not like Clark's policy on something and would buy foam from a competitor. When Clark became aware of that, they were summarily cut off from the factory. His logic: why work to help someone succeed who has proven they may turn against you?

Gordon remains a great friend to have and a ruthless enemy. When he suddenly shut down in 2005, it sent a shockwave through the sport, and around the world. Completely dismantling and obliterating his non-derivative process—to protect he and his family against the liability inferred by anyone else's ongoing use of it—was not something that he did lightly. During that period, in a phone conversation with Debbie Pezman, Gordon described disassembling his prototype machines and destroying his molds as akin to killing a child he had raised. Yet, in hindsight, it just may have been the best thing that could have happened to him.

Today, ten years later, Gordon has moved on, well past that chapter of his life and is fully reengaged as the owner/operator of the immense sheep and cattle operation, Hay Creek Ranch, covering one hundred square

miles, comprising 4 percent of the Oregon county in which it resides and containing three climate zones. In so doing, he has applied the same inquisitive logic and inventiveness that he used to perfect and manufacture surfboard foam to earn, as a relative newcomer to that world, Central Oregon's "Cattleman of the Year" honors in 2014.

On July 30, 2015 Gordon Clark was inducted into the Huntington Beach Walk of Fame for his vast contributions to the sport of surfing. The following is his acceptance speech, which is the closest he has come to publicly revealing thoughts on his years spent serving the surfboard industry. —S.P.

Believe it or not, this is my first speech to a surfing audience since the 1960s. I rarely gave interviews. This was part of my very successful business strategy. Do not compete with your customers. My customers were all competing (amongst themselves) for recognition and publicity.

I am not here for my surfing. There are awesome surfers represented here. I want it to be clear that I am not here for the promotion of surfing. I never did any of that stuff—zero. No sponsorships, no contests, no movies, no surf clothes, no organizations, no parties, no books, or magazines. [All true, however, Clark Foam logo t-shirts were prized gifts from his delivery truck drivers. Also, Grubby didn't throw business parties but was infamous for his manner of attendance at raucous Laguna Beach parties and for his outrageously-legendary holiday parties held at his rental A-frame hanging over the cliff-edge at Killer Dana (i.e. Ronald Patterson drunk, doing one-armed elbow-stands, wrist-wrestling Hev's, eating X-mas tree ornaments, and walking the railing around the outside deck—a 250-foot drop should he lose his balance). Though Grubby never did run ads in surf magazines, he cleverly offered to contribute to the cost for surfboard ads that included his logo, thus his logo was plastered all over the magazines.]

I am being inducted into this Hall of Fame strictly for the development and production of the core of the sport itself—the surfboard. I believe this is a first for this Hall of Fame. Being inducted for the development and production of the thing you stand on when you are riding a wave is actually a great honor. I will try to explain why.

Most of the people writing about the development of the surfboard get

it wrong. The modern surfboard was actually developed, for the most part, in small steps and an awful lot of people have been involved. An incredible number of materials, construction techniques, and designs have been tried. Some worked and some did not. Some were used for a while then discarded. There have been steps backward. I give a lot of credit to everyone who tried. Ultimately, it's the very top surfers who tell us what works best—so, in a sense, they are the final designers. To be the best surfer you must ride the best surfboard.

It would take hours to explain all of this and today I have less than five minutes—and I'm not supposed to swear—but I can give you an example that may shock you. In the late 1940s, Bob Simmons, the first guy to use fiberglass, had in his shop all the materials necessary to build what we consider today to be the latest, high performance, epoxy board. It would have been brownish in color but comparable in weight and strength to today's boards. The fiberglass was not as strong then as today but the brownish resin was stronger. The extruded polystyrene foam was invented by the giant Dow Chemical in 1941 and has changed little over the decades. Imagine the reaction if Simmons had showed up at a surf spot getting tube rides and pulling aerials in the early 50s.

It was not until about a decade later, 1958 to be exact, that enough of the pieces were put together to make a commercially available, shaped, foam longboard that surfed better and lasted longer than balsa, using a different resin and different foam. It exploded the sport. It was another decade or so until there was a short board. That was due, in part, to improvements in fiberglass and polyurethane foam. From that point on, the aggressiveness of the research for a better surfboard can be illustrated by the fact that the computer surfboard-shaping machine was invented and built in 1980, well before there was an IBM PC or Mac, when Bill Gates was still writing basic computer language code and Steve Jobs was just moving out of a garage. So, when I think about the number of individuals who've contributed to the development of the modern surfboard, it is a great honor to be the first one of them picked for this Hall of Fame.

At 82 years of age, I've watched surfing grow from a small number of surfers mostly in California and Hawaii to what it is today. I got to

watch most of the modern surfboard's development unfold. Here are a few of my personal highlights:

My first board weighed 90 pounds. I got my first job building surfboards as a teenager, working for Tom Blake, the guy who invented the hollow surfboard and the fin—the later what you might call a huge step forward. My second job was working for Hobie. His incredible lifetime record of achievements includes board-building techniques still in use in a modified form. Hoyle Schweitzer and I built our first surfboards together in our college dorm. We were attempting to copy the great surfer/shaper Matt Kivlin's first balsa prototype of the modern longboard. Later, Hoyle went on to be granted the patent on windsurfing. In 1969, Dimitrije Milovich built the first Winterstick snowboard out of high-density surfboard foam that I had made for him, and he glassed it like a surfboard. Bruce Brown was my next door neighbor when he made *The Endless Summer*, the blockbuster film that spread surfing around the world—the biggest promotional event in the history of the sport.

An interesting way to understand what my life's work was about was to watch surf movies, from the oldest to the newest. Notice how the improvements in surfboards and the riding of them are linked together. I always had limited resources. I had to try and sort out or anticipate what improvements in the surfboard were going to be successful. This could get really, really complex. Then I had to try to direct my limited resources to meet that demand.

Luckily, in making those decisions I understood a lot about surfing and its culture. That helped a lot. I surfed and some of my best friends were acknowledged as the best in the world. They helped me, especially Gerry Lopez. I had worked at every phase of surfboard manufacturing and had a great college education. I also used several generations of suppliers, board builders, shapers, and glassers, as well as the great surfers as a resource. I learned early not to just ask, "What do you want?" I had to dig far deeper. I constantly talked to many people, studied my statistics, and reviewed my own extensive history of experience.

It was a great, great job. I loved it. I wish I were young today and could start all over with the surfboard itself. Though the opportunities have never been greater, I offer a warning. You had better get a far better education and be really smart. I had it

easy compared to what you are facing.

Last, I would mention that surfing is more fun than anything I have ever done. It was my biggest and most important trade secret. I knew that what we were making worked well, and that if we improved the surfboard, it would be even more fun.

### Evolutionary Surfers

Timothy Leary, from a 1976 interview first published in *Surfer Magazine*: "We're all attempting to find words and metaphors for processes that are hard to describe in words. Surfing has always had that problem, as you've already suggested. One of the best ways of describing what we're doing is to define our roles as 'evolutionary surfers.' Everything is made of waves. At the level of electrons and neutrons—it's part of a wave theory, historical waves, cultural waves. The more you think about the evolutionary process, the more you see the fundamental structure of nature itself. It's the quantum theory, dealing with quantum leaps and quantum waves, things come packaged in sequential, cyclical, moving, ever-changing forms..."

"...A surfer is dealing with the most basic elements of all. There's almost no technology, and there's no symbolism. It's just the individual dealing with the power of the ocean, which gets into the power of lunar pulls, and of tidal ebbs and flows; and it's no accident that many, perhaps most, surfers have become almost mystics, or—I hate to use the word, spiritual. I prefer the word neurological excursion. But they've somehow been able to get in touch with the infinity, and into the turbulence of the power of their own brain, and you can talk about surfing brain waves as you would about surfing external waves. There's a purity about surfing. There's a great sense of timing. Of course, if you study how evolution works and how the DNA code builds bodies and builds species, timing is of absolute importance. Being in the right place at the right time, it happens that whatever you do. You can't create a wave, you know; it comes and there's a time to move and a time to lay back. It's almost Taoist poetry. Almost Einsteinian."

### Off The Lips

Mickey Munoz while judging the San Onofre Club Contest: "He would have won if he didn't do what he did!" And after the heat: "You wouldn't even know he was a surfer if you ran into him at the mall."

## L I N E R N O T E S

There are folks who don't particularly care for the South Shore of Oahu. They cite the pollution, the crowds, the parking, the SUP flotillas, the vibes, and the crime. Those same folks will point out their preference for the Outer Islands, if not entirely different Pacific chains. Odious comparisons for sure. But there's plenty to like about Town. The flashes of green mountains you see in the interstices between high-rises catch you off guard. During a swell, oxygenated salt spray drifts down Kalakaua, champagne fashion, effervescing and reminding you that the reefs are mere yards away. There's the hubris of the high-end boutiques, the poignancy of the street hookers. There's the timeless hustle of the beachboys and the scent of saimin broth, the empty glassine ice bags in the gutter and the pistol parlors for tourists from arms-restricted Asia. I have some history and some family on the South Shore, but my street knowledge is outdated and I haven't ridden a wave there since a Bush was in office.

That didn't present any sort of problem until my friend Devon hit me with some links from his shooter friend, Keoki. At the same time, Jeff Divine hollered that he had a sheaf of the goods from a photographer named Heff. Seems Town has been really good. So the problem was words. Journal friend, Berkeley prof, and kamaaina Thomas Farber offered up a rip from his latest book.



It was predictably excellent, but topically at odds. I remembered that Stuart Cornuelle, one of the founders of the vibrant mag *What Youth*, had grown up in Honolulu, a graduate of Punahou. He got back to me and said he was out of the game, having just been accepted to Stanford Business. When pressed, he offered up his friend David Wong, a 20-something architect and hobby writer. Managing Ed Alex Wilson (a full-time lit geek and ex-writing prof) marched Mr. Wong through the process. To Alex's

Turn to Page 24 in your hymnal.

Assistant photo editor Shawn Parkin had a work gig in Seattle. A wedding or something. I can't quite recall. Being efficient (and having mouths to feed), Parkin asked me if we had any subjects in the PNW he might bang out while he was up there. Yes, I said. How about Gordon Hempton, an Olympic Peninsula bodysurfer and acoustic ecologist who solos icy sandbar waves and



hikes deep into the rain forest to record wild sound—or, more precisely, wild quiet? Parkin has a latent crunchy side and this was right up his alley. They were thick as thieves instantly, a wonderful pairing of subject and chronicler. Parkin also worked his ass off and it shows in the final product. The compositions are workmanlike but sympathetic, and the finishing process used in the final files is, to my eye, saturated and beautiful. Sometimes it just comes together.

Another fortuitous pairing in the issue is slotted toward the front of the book. Thumb-flip to the gatefold and you'll find a handful of photographs by Jay Mark Johnson. I stumbled upon his work while checking the stable at Santa Monica's ace Turner Gallery. Not knowing exactly what I was looking at, I struggled with the idea that the shooter used a camera that, in a single frame, recorded the entirety of a breaking wave. Publishing these mechanical anomalies was one thing. Finding the fellow to explain it was another. Calling John Durant took only a moment. I look for any excuse to interact with John. Twins in many ways, we finish one another's sentences and go cuckoo for the same stuff (Harry Crosby Baja photography, Point Loma fishing culture, *Sexy Beast*, Ferus Gallery, on and on, really).

So there you go. All the cultural stuff you want with all the surf balls you need. Have fun with the issue.

—SCOTT HULET

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