

Paipo - Belly boarding in Australia

New South Wales # 1



Barry Hutchins at Garie- c1965. Photo Rick Shapter.



Photo from Margan, F. and Finney, B.F. (1970).
A pictorial history of surfing. Paul Hamlyn, London.

Cronulla and south

As the first point of British settlement, the biggest city and a major commercial centre it is not surprising that Sydney, which is the only capital city with proximate, reliable surf would be a centre of surfing activity. manufacturing. From at least the late 1950s simple ply bellyboards were being ridden around Cronulla. These were often ridden by young teenagers who would later progress onto riding kneeboards or standups boards. In addition to home-made boards Dr. Barry Hutchins at Cronulla (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 single fin. Photo Barry Hutchins



Hutchins twin fin. Photo Barry Hutchins.



Hutchins tri fin. Photo Barry Hutchins.



Hutchins personal board. Photo Barry Hutchins.



Barry Hutchins 1965 4' x 22" tri-fin.
Photo Barry Hutchins.



Photo Barry Hutchins.

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. Cronulla attracted innovators and eccentrics. Bob Griffiths 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.



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

Waves of paipo surfers came and went, often unfamiliar with those who came before or followed them. Many started out as bodysurfers. Barry Regan (2010) recalled Lloyd Webster, Ronnie Bowler, Neal Stenhouse and Nigel Dwyer taking up bellyboards after seeing the balsa boards of the visiting 1956 US/Hawaiian lifeguard team. Rick Shapter rode one of Barry Hutchins boards

while Bob Griffiths (2010) recalls Jeff Rowe, Barry Darby, Dave Shaw and Steve Doney riding bellyboards at Cronulla. He also recalled boards being made at nearby Sutherland by Dave Cowell (?). To this list, Ray Ryan (Ryan 2010) added Dave Croft, Geoff Bird and Adam Platta. Ryan said bellyboards were known as paipo around Cronulla and that they became "extinct" around 1966. 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.

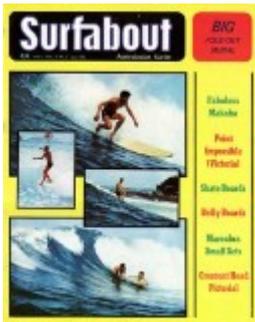


Ray Greenaway and Garry Birdsall, Avoca surf trip 1958
Photo Ray Hitchensen, courtesy Garry Birdsall



Garry Birdsall and John Day
Photo Ray Hitchensen, courtesy Garry Birdsall.

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
Surfabout Cover - Vol 3(1)
1964.
Courtesy Al Hunt.



Lewis and Greg.
Cronulla Point.
Surfabout Cover - Vol
3(1) 1964.
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.
Photo Lewis Cawsey

A couple of years earlier 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.



Deck view - Graham King
bellyboard.
Photo Henry Marfleet



Graham King bellyboard. Photo
Henry Marfleet.

Cronulla Point featured in a 1964 article on bellyboards (Unknown 1964a). Photos included Rick Shapter and Julie Gibson bodysurfing (Shapter 2010). Shapter is currently making a replica of his old board The board is constructed of plane sawn, Western Red Cedar that was dowed 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.



Bottom view
Photo courtesy Rick
Shapter

Unfinished Hutchins replica bellyboard.
Photo courtesy Rick Shapter.



1960s Cronulla paipo owned by Wayne Munroe
Photo source Paul Burrige

Other bellyboarders from New South Wales included 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. Fibreglass prone boards have been made and ridden around Bawley Point by John Kovar (Malaroo). Kovar first made a bellyboard around 1992 from a broken long board and has 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). It is planned that boards will become available again through Malaroo surfboard geometry.com [Malaroo surfboards](http://malaroo.com)



John Kovar. Photo John Kovar.



malaroo tuberide. Photo John Kovar.



Malaroo - concave bottom. Photo John Kovar.



Malaroo. Photo John Kovar



John Kovar "Einstein" logo
Photo John Kovar.



John Kovar, Dianne and David Guy
Photo Bob Green.

North of Ulladulla, Adam Williams and mates ride paipo, as well as mats and kneeboards. 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". For information see: [Mako bellyboards](#)



Mako bellyboards
Photo Stephen Laws.



Mako bellyboards
Photo Stephen Laws



Stephen Laws test riding
[Mako bellyboards facebook page](#)



Stephen Laws test riding
[Mako bellyboards facebook page](#)


Mako bellyboards
Photo Stephen Laws



Mako bellyboards
Photo Stephen Laws

Extras



Cronulla area bellyboard
Photo Chris Stroh.



Cronulla area bellyboard
Photo Chris Stroh. [Cronulla bodyboard museum](#)

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