

Belly boarding in Australiasia

Queensland



Kit Carson, Jeff Callaghan and Robert McDermott -Kirra 1965. Photo courtesy Kit Carson.



Tom Wegener. Photo Sean Davey.

In 1965 Bob McDermott had come up from by Maroubra in Sydney on a surf trip. Gold coast lifesavers Bob 'Kit' Carson and Jeff Callaghan recalled seeing McDermott surfing his bellyboard in cyclonic surf at Kirra. Carson recalls being "pretty impressed" (Carson 2010). Joe Larkin set up his factory in 1962 and recalled: "When I moved to Kirra the balsa was gone and I just used the plan shape from those early days for the plywood boards. I got four boards out of a sheet of 3/16 inch ply, 6 feet by 3 feet. Fins were three inches high and about 4-1/2 inches long, with a 3-inch chrome kitchen cupboard handle. I loved these little boards and we all had a great time surfing Snapper and Kirra" (Larkin 2012). The Gold Coast bellyboarders consisted of lifesavers such as Carson, Callaghan and surfers such as Col Taylor and Joe Larkin. Others included Mal Sutherland, Vinnie Ford, Graham Dunne, Mark Green, Terry Law, Graham Byrnes, Ken Wiles, Mick Potter, and Jimmy Purdon. Carson and Callaghan surfed from Noosa down to at least Lennox Head, and then moved to Torquay around 1965.



Robert McDermott_Snapper May 1965. Photo courtesy Kit Carson



Col Taylor (left) and Kit Carson with bellyboards. Photo courtesy Kit Carson



Twin fin close-up. Photo Kerrie Carson



Michael Potter 1960s bellyboard Photo courtesy Michael Potter



Michael Potter 1960s bellyboard Photo courtesy Michael Potter



Kirra c 1973
[Unidentified surfer](#)



Kirra c 1973
[See 1:02](#)



Kirra c 1973
[Original footage - Gary Smiley?](#)



Kirra c 1973
[Source: Craig Halstead Coastalwatch](#)

In the mid 1960's Barr recalls surfing a wooden bellyboard purchased by his brother, from the Myer department at Tweed Heads in the mid to late 1960s (Barr 2010b). It was a Whiz Skid, bellyboard/skimboard made by Blue Pacific Aquatic Products in Brisbane, by Ken Fowler (Potter 2010). Barr and his friends rode the board around Kingscliff but also remembers fellow Tweed High students riding wooden bellyboards around Coolangatta(2010a).



Whiz Skid.
Photo courtesy Kevin Barr



Whiz Skid logo.
Photo courtesy Kevin Barr



Whiz Skid.
Photo courtesy Kevin Barr

Ken Adler (2010) advises that Candy Calhoun was in Australia for three years: 1965-1967. It was during this time that Calhoun featured in the above The Australian Women's Weekly article (McGetrick 1966). He made her a board similar to a board made by Gordon Thiesz, who surfed with Candy in the US (Moynier 2010). Candy mostly surfed Alexandra Headland and when the conditions were right, National Park at Noosa head. For many years this board was in the possession of Darrel Dell. Calhoun, who along with her mother (Marge) and sister (Robin) competed internationally, rode Wedge and Pipeline bodysurfing.



Candy Calhoun US paipo rider.
Australian Women's Weekly- 1966



Replica of a 60 design
Photo Gary Clist

In terms of fibreglass bellyboards, Eddie Sawden who in the 1960s worked for Carey Surfboards advised that there were casual orders for bellyboards (Sawden 2009) and Lawrie Hohensee who also shaped for Carey, reported that he made bellyboards during the 1960s and beyond (2009). Barr (2010) recalls Graham Merrin surfboards from Tweed Heads (NSW) and Mick Carey Surfboards from Currumbin, as making the occasional bellyboard, "sometimes using the noses cut from cut down surfboards". Woosley in Brisbane made at least the occasional bellyboard. One example resembles scaled down longboard.



Ray Woosley 4'6 bellyboard, c 1965. E-Bay photo.

In addition to the bellyboarders identified above, Henry Marfleet (UK) located a letter from an 'ex D.Y surfer' (1964) who wrote from Brisbane and referred to fellow bellyboarders Graham Wyles, John Paul, Gary Edwards and Robert Smith. Ash's 1994 bellybagger booklet contains a testimonial from Greg Lee from Bribie Island. Ash at the time was located in Noosa, so it is likely there were some other bellybagger riders in that area as well. John Standing currently rides the latest bellybagger incarnation. Wayne Tommasi (Tommasi 2009) has collected a range of bellyboards from the 1960 to 1970s, including boards made by Shell Shapes, Papworth, Kirra Surf, the Shaping Company and Tweed Coast surfboards. Nothing is known about who specifically made these boards.

Bellyboarding in Australiasia



1960s-1970s bellyboards. Wayne Tommasi collection.



1960s-1970s bellyboards. Wayne Tommasi collection. [Photonote 1](#)

Bellyboards continue to be ridden in Queensland. Tommasi from Palm Beach rides a bellyboard made by Paul Carson from Caloundra while Anthony Young rides a Van Straalen bellyboard. Just beneath the border Chris Garrett from Phantom surfboards has produced a number of custom bellyboards for Bob Green. These have been based on the designs of Larry Goddard from Hawaii. The boards have been around 53 3/4" x 20" with varying maximum thicknesses (under 2"). On the Sunshine coast, Peter Webb has been riding bellyboards made by Mark Pridmore, of More surfboards



Garrett's Melaleuca missile #1
Photo Bob Green



Garrett's Melaleuca missile #2
Photo Bob Green



Garrett's Melaleuca missile #4
Photo Bob Green



Bob Green on a Melaleuca Missile #4
Photo Janelle Green



Bob Green
Photo John Kovar



Bob Green
Photo John Kovar



Van Straalen bellyboard.
Photo Wayne Tommasi



Van Straalen bellyboard -2012
Photo Anthony Young



Van Straalen bellyboard -2012
Photo Anthony Young



Peter Webbs board. Photo More surfboards



Mark Pridmore bellyboard
More surfboards

At the other end of the construction spectrum are the alaia style boards that can be ridden prone. Paul Joske and Tom Wegener have been pioneers in the use of paulownia as a surfboard construction material in Australia (Gray 2008, Sutherland 2008). Wegener rides and manufactures paulownia alaia and UK style ply bellyboards. Also in Noosa, Parrish Watts has been making wooden boards in the style of UK bellyboards (Watts 2010).



Tom Wegener with author's alaia. Photo courtesy Tom Wegener



Tom riding a surfie. Photo <http://www.tomwegenersurfboards.com>

Extras



60s ply board - located at a Noosa charity shop
Photo Gary Clist.



60s ply board - located at a Noosa charity shop
Photo Gary Clist.



1960s Carey bellyboard
Surfworld Currumbin



1960s Carey bellyboard
Surfworld Currumbin



1960s Carey bellyboard
Surfworld Currumbin



Hohensee bellyboard? Shaper Geoff Darby.
Photo Gary Clist.



Hohensee bellyboard? Shaper Geoff Darby.
Photo Gary Clist.



Unidentified bellyboard
Photo Gary Clist.



Hohensee bellyboard? Shaper Geoff Darby.
Photo Gary Clist.



Hohensee bellyboard? Shaper Geoff Darby.
Photo Gary Clist.



Unidentified bellyboard
Photo Gary Clist.



3' bellyboard from Carl Tanner collection
Photo Rob Ryan.



3' bellyboard from Carl Tanner collection
Photo Rob Ryan.



3' bellyboard from Carl Tanner collection
Photo Rob Ryan.

Photograph details

1. Wayne Tommasi Boards: Left to right:

Board 1. Early to mid 70's stringerless 4ft 2"x 19 3/4" Spirit of the sea Kirra Gold Coast Pencil on foam 436/A Shaper? Dick Van Straalen said he can't remember if he shaped it or not. He said he can't remember much from that era, but his wife designed the Logo. Board 2. My personal board March 2009 I used the Hohensee as a guide shortened it 2" widened and squared the tail 2" added 2 1/2" keel fins plus centre fin box. Slight concave on deck. Shaped and glassed by Paul Carson (The Factory Surfboards, Caloundra). Board 3. Early to mid 70's stringerless 4'6" x 19 3/4" single fin Logo Hohensee 'OVER FREE FLIGHT BIRD LOGO' - Hohensee Miami Gold Coast shaper? Board 4. Late 60's early 70's 4'7" x 20 1/2" single fin Carey. Surfboards Currumbin Gold Coast. Shaper Eddie Sawden said if Carey Logo was block lettered he would have shaped it. No other Markings on board.

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