

Belly boarding in Australiasia

Victoria



Kit Carson at Winkipop. Winter 1969. Photo Kerrie Carson.



Jeff Callaghan- Winkipop. Photo courtesy Kerrie Carson.

Victoria

At various times bellyboards in Victoria have been made and ridden on both the east and west coasts. From the mid-1950s a small number of balsa bellyboards were made by well known Victorian surfboard manufacturers. Bill Clymer moved to Sydney in 1957 and while it is not clear if he made bellyboards while in Victoria the style of board he did make was made by others. For example, Fred Pyke, also built twin-finned balsa bellyboards as did Rod Sly on the east coast. Like Clymer, Sly bellyboards were a means to use up the balsa offcuts. Jamie Farfor from Portsea also built himself a balsa bellyboard but after nearly knocking out his teeth he sold the board, who carved a lot of the balsa away to form a sort of spoon. Unlike other boards, Farfor's board was coated with linseed.(Farfor 2010, 2011). Vic Tantau, originally an agent for Bill Clymer (Smith 2009c) produced the balsa Bellooma, in the 1950s/1960s. One such Bellooma was a 5'3" twin-finned board made for Chris Carey's mother, Jill (Curtain 2009). In the Torquay Surf World museum there is a 4'6 Peter Kendall wooden bellyboard made in 1957 (cost ten pounds). This board featured twin fins and a wooden hand grip. Nothing else is known of Kendall. This style of twin-finned board, minus the handle, would be re-visited in the 1970s-1980s. Smith recalls bellyboards being ridden by Aub Cherry and Ivan Orbuck along with others from the Torquay SLSC (Smith 2009a). The Surf World museum lists Tubby Wallis, Frank Johnson, Owen Yateman and Bill Morris as other local bellyboard riders.



4'6" x 20.5" 1957 Kendall bellyboard.
Torquay Surfworld museum.



1957 Kendall bellyboard. Torquay Surfworld museum



1950s balsa bellyboard.
Ridden by Yaterman, Wallis and Johnson.
Torquay Surfworld museum.



1950s balsa bellyboard.
Torquay Surfworld museum



Clymer bellyboard bellyboard.
Torquay Surfworld museum.



Clymer bellyboard bellyboard.
Torquay Surfworld museum



Fred Pyke replica. Bob
Smith collection.



2010 replica of a Fred
Pyke bellyboard.
Bob Smith collection.



Fin close up.
Bob Smith collection.



Fred Pyke bellyboard
profile.
Bob Smith collection.



Carey Tantau belloomer.



Carey Tantau belloomer.

In the 1960s Farfor would become known for manufacturing ply paipo in the style of the Hawaiian Paipo Nui boards. A few years later after a 1964 trip to Hawaii, Farfor built a mould to produce a ply paipo based on the Paipo Nui boards (Farfor 2009). While sold commercially in Hawaii by Val Valentine the Paipo Nui were based on a design developed by John Waidelich and Jim Growney. Valentine (1965) and Growney (2009) have described the story of these paipo boards. Farfor estimated he sold about 100 such boards (Farfor 2009).

Regarding how the boards were made, Farfor e-mailed: "I built a dish-shaped mould, and had an air bladder of insertion rubber over it - all restrained in a heavy frame. The idea was to form 3 or 4 boards at a time, one on top of the other. If the thing had exploded, it would probably taken me with it. I would do it differently another time round.

Good veneer was difficult to get in Australia, and it was very expensive. It was because of this that I had another stroke of luck. I decided to try forming the boards using three layers of 1/8" hoop pine 3 ply. I reasoned that with the 50 psi or so in the air bladder of my forming machine, that I would push a 2 way curve into the 3 ply. The 2 way curve was formed OK, and the shape sprang back a little when the pressure was released. It was because of this spring-back that I found that the Val Valentine curve was too severe, and that the boards went better with less curvature. You only need enough curve to stop the nose pearling under normal use, and it is a benefit to be able to force the board to dive if you want to get out of a difficult situation".

Regarding flexibility, I built boards with and without the resin reinforced fabric cover to the underside. The uncovered ones were an 'economy' model. It is surprising how much stiffness the resin and fabric adds to the board. I reckon that this is absolutely necessary in big surf.

Riding these boards was something the rider had to work out for themselves. Farfor advised: "I had no trouble getting onto big fast waves, even with a stiff headwind. Hold the leading edge with arms extended, then press down with the forearms in order to keep flippers submerged during a short burst of supreme effort. This also has the effect of keeping the board flat on the face of the wave, and you can pull yourself through onto the board as it takes off. I always seemed to get onto any wave as soon or sooner than any other type of board.

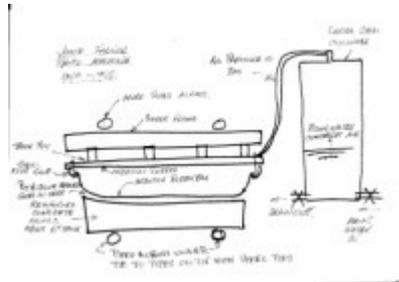
The thrill was the speed - you could hold a really tight corner, but if any really sharp turns were attempted, the whole thing would break free, and as likely as not you would end up going backward. To turn, you lifted the outside rail, and without any extra effort your body moved toward the inside rail. The inside arm would then get in the way, so it is natural to extend the inside arm. Using this method it is possible to get tight in the curl of the wave. It is possible to cut back, but without a fin I never managed to turn make the second turn back into the curl.

Because the paipo is short, I never had any trouble with steep takeoffs. Late takeoffs were another thing. It is possible to drop with the crest of the wave, but you would skid out the front of the wave into flat water and lose the opportunity to turn into the curl. To get off a wave, the easiest thing is to turn up through the crest of the wave. You can go a long way in the air, and it is best not to stick with the board when you land. It is possible to extend as far out front of your board as arms will allow, then dive underwater. You can't do this at speed - your head simply will not dive under. Turning to run out in front of the wave you slow down enough to dive".



Farfor paipo.

<http://www.soulsurf.com.au/>



Farfor's mould.
Drawing by Jamie Farfor.



Farfor paipo -deck view. Torquay Surfworld museum.



Farfor paipo.



Farfor paipo. The fins are a later add-on.

<http://www.vonweirdos.com>



Farfor paipo.

<http://www.surfresearch.com.au/00000193.html>



Farfor logo.

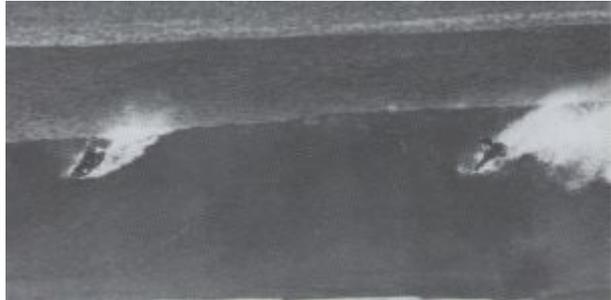


Farfor paipo.
Torquay Surfworld museum.

Surfing in Torquay was originally centered around the surf life saving club. A history of the Torquay SLSC (Pollard 1996) contains photos of Ian Seeley, Bryan Hayden (2010) and 'Kit' Carson riding plywood bellyboards. John Olson and Bruce Morgan were two other locals who rode these boards. In 1965 two Queenslanders had come to Victoria, Bob 'Kit' Carson (Carson 2010) and Jeff Callaghan (Callaghan 2010) to be followed by Col Taylor (2010). Winkipop was the favoured location for riding these boards. Bob Smith reported that body surfers using hand planes and bellyboarders surfed Winki in the mid 1960s but with increasing crowds in the early 1970s they "disappeared" from the Winki/Bells lineups (Smith 2009a).



Ian Seeley "cracking a ripper at Bells Beach".
Photo from Pollard 1996.



Carson and Hayden at Bells - 1970
Photo from Pollard 1996.



John Olsen at Winki
Photo Kerrie Smith



Bryan Hayden at Winki
Photo courtesy Bryan Hayden.

Kit Carson (2010) has described these boards: "We never really got that sophisticated. We played around a little bit. We really just stuck to the basic model. They were quarter inch marine ply. They were about a metre long. Probably 18 inches wide I think, and two skegs. We had a chrome door handle, up the front on the left because we mainly surfed righthanders". The fins were about 100 mm, "parallel and right at the back, just about an inch from the end". Bryan Hayden (2010) recalled: "Kit and Ian experimented but kept coming back to what produced the most speed. Large fins were a failure, small twin fins were best. Boards were best kept short, dead flat, with one only extra large handle to protect your knuckles. Originally they were little door handles. You'd hold onto those – the clearance between your knuckles and the board itself would maybe only a centimetre. What we found if we took a tumble or got into real strife that your board would be all but ripped out of your hands, flipped over it would tear your knuckles on the board. So, what we did, Ian Seeley designed it, what he did was get copper pipe, he designed a handle that would be about 3" high and 4" long – instead of being low and curved shape, it went up, across and down. The clearance between the top handle and the board was enough for your whole wrist, fist to swing around, so if the board got flung, your knuckles would clear the board. We learned the hard way on that. We always had bare knuckles. The other thing that we found about it, we were able to hang onto our boards better. Because we used copper pipe 30 mm thick so you could actually grab onto it. The previous ones were little thin chrome door handles and they were too thin to hang onto, to really get a grip on, they'd rip out of your hands". The boards in the photos below were "Three feet long. At the rear it's about 15 inches wide, rounded at the front the actual width would have been about 17 inches. 3 ply".

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Bryan Hayden bellyboard.
Photo courtesy Bryan Hayden.



Twin fin bellyboard.
Photo courtesy Bryan Hayden.



Not much rocker
Photo courtesy Bryan Hayden.



Single fin
Photo courtesy Bryan Hayden.

Kit Carson explains how to ride these boards: "So you'd hold them with your left hand and you'd tuck them right under your chest and then you'd lean your right shoulder, your inside shoulder virtually into the wave, and that's how you got your balance. You drove, you're just sort of locked in – all the bellyboard was, was a slightly smoother planing surface than your body. It ran from about your chest down to your thighs. The trick to riding them most efficiently, I think, was almost to be back to the wall of the wave. You actually get some balance in the wave with the weight of your inside shoulder. On a really steep wave it's a bit like body surfing. You almost roll so your outside shoulder is up into the wave.

For someone who hadn't evolved onto riding conventional boards it was the same attraction everyone has in surfing. The nature, the peace, the quiet, the speed, the adrenalin, the silence of just blasting across a steep wall and hearing, on a big day in particular, that roar like a washing machine just behind you, with the barrel crunching over. It's there but you're beating it. It's just this big bloody vertical wall of glass. It's almost like you are breaking the sound barrier going through it, but I'm sure you're not. You're probably just going 35 kph or something, but it's the whole nature thing, the solitude, the whole ambiance of the place. I think you have to surf to understand it, don't you? I guess the difference to surfing with boards and (surf) skis is that you are closer to the wave, if that makes sense. You are actually in the wave, not on it. I lost some of that sensation when I was on boards or skis".

Bryan Hayden noted: "immediately after you got the momentum you'd push the board right back under your thighs, so you weren't lying on the board at all. What you did was catapulted your body beyond the front of the board so where you were holding the handle, you pushed that back so that would be back where your hip was, your hand was holding onto the board with the handle on the nose of your board back underneath your hip and you'd arch your back. If you were going

to the right you'd put your right arm out directly in front of you so as to get as much weight out as much as possible and they would absolutely fly. Your whole body was cantilevered out over the front of the board and you were planing on a surface that was akin to your navel down the board".



Kit Carson, Winki
Photo courtesy Kerrie Carson.



Rocky Hall at Winki



Jeff Callaghan at Winki, June 1969. Photo courtesy Kit Carson



Kit Carson, Winki June 1969.
Photo courtesy Jeff Callaghan



Unidentified - Winki



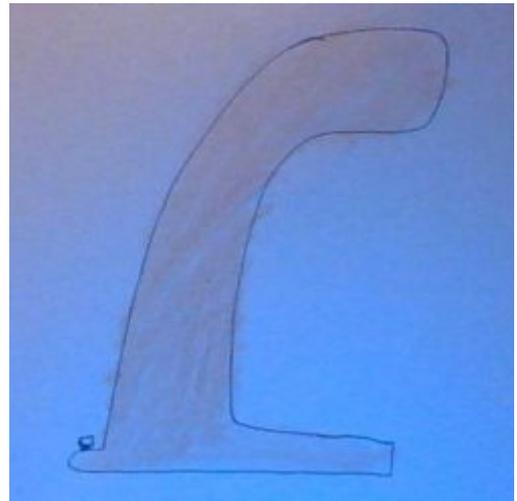
Jeff- sleeveless wetsuit - Winter 69
Photo courtesy Kerrie Carson.

In addition to Farfor on the east coast, from the 1960s a number of surfers rode fibreglass bellyboards around the Mornington Peninsula and Phillip Island. John Burns recalls returning to surfing around 1969, first on surf mats then on bellyboards. John then purchased a Morey boogie board kit. After assembling the kit, Burns wrote: "... took it down to Bells beach to try it out in big surf, I went out with the locals eg Rod Brooke's , Piping Hot, Alan Green, Quick Silver and many others in surf about 8-- 10 ft. Then the fun started, the boogie went well until I worked my way inside, took off through the bowl, did a heavy bottom turn and the rails top and bottom came apart, so a long swim back etc. (Burns 2015). Subsequently Burns had boards made by Trigger Brothers, Tom Tyrell and Neil Luke, Island Surf, Alan Oke Surf, Laurie Thompson of Islantis. For heavy shore breaks his favourite board was a copy of Dick Ash's bellybogger. Of the board in the photo below, Burns wrote: "This board is my basic design of which I tweaked the rails, tail and bottom shape at various times to try and obtain better performance, but this baby worked the

best for me,had great times on it. I also tried various fin styles,the one I liked the best was a surf ski fin which comprised of a fin box fitting, long shaft and small blade at the bottom. I found that on steep, glassy waves I could have board put of the water with only the blade in the water, nice and fast".



Trigger bellyboard.
Photo by David Wigg.



McManus drawing of the fin on his re-shaped ski.

Drawing by McManus



Oke bellyboard.
Photo by Kev McManus



Oke bellyboard.
Photo by Kev McManus



Kev with his Howard Hughes bellyboard at Wilson's Promontory

Burns version of a bellybopper ended up in the hands of Kevin McManus. McManus obtained the board, like his first board, from his friend who had bought at least two of Burn's boards. McManus was going to the beach with his mates around 1978/1979 and recalled his first board was shaped by Trigger Brothers. The board was the front section of a wave ski with the footstrap used as a handle at the front of the board. The board sat out of the water, had wave-ski

style twin fin boxes and fins. The shape was round nose square rails, chopped square tail. This was a Burns board, ridden by McManus, who roamed the coast between Victoria and Northwest Western Australia.

Point Leo was not only where Rod Sly sold his bellyboards in the 1950s (Sly 2015), but would be the location where John Buising (2015) and Gary Richardson (2015) kicked off their surfing lives. Richardson bought a George Rice bellyboard and Buising rode a Rice bellyboard belonging to Geoff Waters from the Point Leo surf club. Waters didn't get much of a chance to ride his board once it was loaned to Buising. However, after seeing a George Greenough film Buising and Richardson bought kneeboards. More recently, Ross Davidson got Mick Pierce to make him a bellyboard. After an accident the board was sold to Trevor Bonney of Warrnambool.



Mick Pierce bellyboard.
Photo by John Buising.



Mick Pierce bellyboard.
Photo by John Buising.



Klemm Bell bellyboard
Mike Brown collection.



Klemm Bell bellyboard
Mike Brown collection.

On both the west coasts Billy-Joe Shearsby (Shearsby 2010) makes and rides wooden alaia, plywood guitar-pick shape Paipo Nui boards and a variety of other board styles. Billy-Joe Shearsby's Paipo Nui-inspired quiver, ranging from 40" to 46". The red board is paulownia, the others are 10-12mm marine ply. The board on the ground is based on a spoon and goes best in choppy or bigger waves. BJ's favourite is the larger blue board (46" x 28") which is virtually dead flat.



Shearsby quiver.
Photo courtesy Billy-Joe Shearsby.



Shearsby quiver.
Photo courtesy Billy-Joe Shearsby.



Shearsby on a Ray Ho'okano replica (44 x 30").
Photo Kat Shearsby.



Shearsby surfing on Hawaii Paipo Design replica (40" x 30")
Photo Kat Shearsby.

Extras



Unidentified, Winki
Photo courtesy Kit Carson.



Kit at Winki, 1969.



Kit Winki or perhaps Bells.
Photo courtesy Kit Carson



Possibly Kit, Torquay area.
Photo courtesy Kerrie Carson



Kit and Jeff- Winki - 1969



Kit and Jeff- Winki - 1969.