

Paipo - Belly boarding in Australiasia

Paipos, bellyboards, lameroos, chestboards - what's in a name?



Surfing c1920 at Point Lonsdale. Photo courtesy Gary Clist.

I've used the term bellyboard but paipo could have been used instead. The distinction is not clear-cut as the account below shows. For the purpose of this history bellyboards will be defined as 'rigid' surf craft typically between 3-5' that were ridden prone (though they could be ridden kneeling or standing). As early kneeboards were often below 5', board length alone remains a somewhat arbitrary criterion.

A variety of boards, from coffin lids to steamed planks were ridden as bellyboards from the early twentieth century onward. The traditional UK style bellyboard in its most developed form is a narrow wooden board with parallel rails and notable nose lift. Geoff Cater has more recently referred to these boards as Empire boards because they were ridden in the British colonies including South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. A variant of these boards were also ridden in France and Spain where they were referred to as a planky and in the US and Brazil, the same style board was ridden but featured two hand holds. In Australia and New Zealand these boards were made available to would-be surfers by beachside guesthouses, such as the Two Bays Guest House in Torquay or Vera Lynn in Lorne (Smith 2009a) and Browne's Accommodation House, Piha.



Wooden boards. Torquay Surfworld museum.



WeeklyNews-Christmas number. October 14, 1940 , page5



Old style bellyboards(deck). Bob Smith collection.



Old style bellyboards(bottom). Bob Smith collection.

One of the best known style of bellyboards is the Paipo Nui boards sold commercially in Hawaii by Val Valentine in the mid 1960s and in more recent times by Paul Lindbergh under the Hawaiian Paipo Design label. These finless, guitar pick shaped boards were developed by John Waidelich and Jim Grownney(2009) in the early 1960s and Waidelich coined the term "Paipo Nui". These finless, low bouyancy boards are considered by many as true paipo boards. In Australasia, the best examples of this style of board were made in the 1960s by Jamie Farfor in Victoria and Peter White in New Zealand; and more recently in New Zealand by the late Dave Jackman.



1960s Farfor paipo board



Dave Jackman paipo and mould

However, in the late 1950s Wally Froiseth of Hawaii had called his twin-finned bellyboards "Pai po". Clark (2011) interviewed Froiseth who stated that he coined the term from the word Hawaiians used when they referred to bodysurfing or bodysurfing with a small board - papa pae po'o (to ride a wave head first), shortened in common use to pae po. In the late 1960s a series of US manufacturers produced boards with the word "Paipo" in the name (Newport Paipo, El Paipo, Huntington Paipo, House of Paipo). Most of these latter boards bore little resemblance to the Hawaiian boards and included bellyboards ridden prone as well as kneeboards. The twin-finned style of board developed by Froiseth was commercially made in Australia by the likes of Bill Clymer, Fred Pyke and Rod Sly. Leigh Tingle still rides his board made by Gordon Woods in 1956.



Froiseth "Pai po" logo.



Clymer bellyboard.
Mke Brown photo.

Over the years bellyboards have been referred to by a range of terms. These include half-boards or half-surfboards (Bloomfield 1958), semi-boards (Klein 1965), chestboards (KUK 1963, Tony Wegener 2015), skimboards (Kelly 1965) and the distinctly Australian name, Lamaroo. An unresolved issue concerns the origin of the word Lamaroo (also spelled loomaroo, lumeroo). Lameroo has been used to refer to UK style bellyboards (e.g boards in the Torquay surf museum) as well as to Froiseth style paipo. Regarding the pre-1950s bellyboards there is speculation that the word Lamaroo is derived from "the word laminate as per the making of them with ply laminate" (Smith 2009b). In 1956 Rod Sly, made twin finned balsa boards he has referred to as "lou marou" (Sly 2010). This interview with Sly suggested that "Lou marou" was "perhaps also the name of a coastal steamer". There indeed was a steamer, the Lammeroo, which was sold to a Chinese firm in 1931. However, in 2015, Rod reported Lou was his sister's name and she had suggested the board would ride like a roo (Sly 2015) [Footnote 2](#). Hanging from the ceiling of the Torquay Lifesavers Club (SLSC) is a twin finned balsa board labelled as a 'loomeroo'. Barry Starke (Starke 2011) recalls buying a Clymer "loomaroo, the precursor to the paipo" in 1958 while in Cater has suggested Lamaroo "may have derived from product labelling by a commercial manufacturer of the period" (Cater 2009c). Cater (2009c) has also provided an alternative spelling "Looma-Roo" (Goetz 1963). In an e-mail Hayden (Hayden 2010) used the spelling "lumeroo". Vic Tantau also from Victoria produced belllooma boards in the late 1950s so another possibility is that "looma" or "loomer" was a local term referring to waves or board. Overall, the origins of the term lameroo with its different spellings has generated speculation but no real evidence.



Alan Coulson's twin
finned 'Loomaroo'.
Torquay SLSC



Rod Sly's Loumaroo



The Lammeroo

[http://www.shipspotting.com/gallery/photo.php?
lid=1672234](http://www.shipspotting.com/gallery/photo.php?lid=1672234)

Footnote

2. Larry O'Brien a US paipo rider also suggested the kangaroo link.

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