

Paipo - Belly boarding in Australasia

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



Surfing c. 1920 at Point Lonsdale. Photo courtesy Gary Clist.



This 1962 photo excerpt displays two prominent bellyboard styles
The Australian Women's Weekly, 30(18), 23.

In these pages, bellyboard has been used as a general term, though the distinction between bellyboard, paipo and other craft is not so clear-cut. 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. In Australia and New Zealand these boards were also made available to would-be surfers by beachside guesthouses, such as the Two Bays Guest House in Torquay and Vera Lynn in Lorne (Smith 2009a), and Browne's Accommodation House, Piha. 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 sometimes featured two hand holds.



Wooden boards. Torquay Surfworld museum.

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WeeklyNews-Christmas number. October 14, 1940 , page5



Old style bellyboards(deck). Bob Smith collection.



Old style bellyboards(bottom). Bob Smith collection.

An important style of bellyboard is the Paipo Nui board which was 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 Growney(2009) in the early 1960s. 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

John Clark who was in regular contact with Wally Froiseth noted: "Wally made his first Hawaiian Pai Po balsa/fiberglass board in December 1955 with no fins. This is the board that he loaned to Jimmy Alama that was stolen. He made a second board without fins, but it side-slipped too much, so he added two fins to it, which were too small and in the wrong position. This was early in 1956, and from then on he continued to experiment with materials, designs, and fins until he could ride the boards to his satisfaction. By 1957, he was riding his paipos prone and standing on big days at Waikiki, Makaha, and Sunset" (Clark 2010b). Further, Wally Froiseth advised: "I first put a single fin on one of my paipos, but when I tried it at Makaha, it was too shaky and not steady enough" (Clark, 2010a). John Clark noted: "Traditional paipo boards until after World War II were generally short, narrow, and thin. Wally's boards were longer, about 4'; wider, about 21" in front narrowing to 18" in the tail, and thicker, about 1 1/2" wide. He also glassed the boards and added a handle in the front and twin fins on the bottom. Given all those features, his boards were different than the existing board" (Clark 2010d).

This style of twin finned bellyboard has proved to be very influential and made and ridden in Australia since the mid-late 1950s, when this style of board may have been brought to Australia by the US Olympic lifeguard team. This style of board has been reported to have featured in an early Bud Browne surf movie (Tingle 2009). In Australia these boards were made by the likes of Bill Clymer, Fred Pyke and Rod Sly. Leigh Tingle still rode his board made by Gordon Woods in 1956, into his 70s.



Froiseth "Pai po" logo.



Clymer bellyboard.
Mike Brown photo.



Another take on a twin fin bellyboard
Wayne Priestly photo



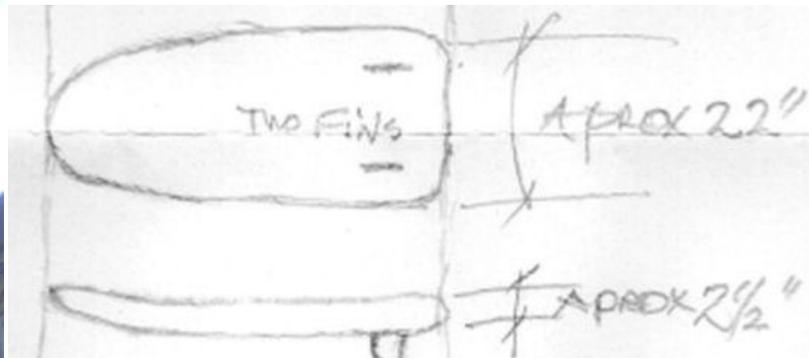
Wayne Priestly photo.

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

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 bellloomaa boards in the late 1950s so another possibility is that "loomaa" 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>

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