

courtesy Jim Phillips



**IN THE BEGINNING** An 1885 visit to Santa Cruz by three Hawaiian princes introduced surfing to the mainland. On their visit the trio had old-growth redwood planks fashioned into boards, setting a trend; Hickenbottom says until the 1910s, most boards in Waikiki were made of San Lorenzo Valley redwood.

# Chairmen of The Board

Excerpted photos from a new history of surfing in Santa Cruz that pays tribute to the characters and community who built the sport

*Santa Cruz Weekly*  
8-12-09

**R**ight after Thomas Hickenbottom signed with Arcadia Publishing last fall to compile a pictorial history of surfing in Santa Cruz, the bottom fell out of his plans. Hickenbottom, a Santa Cruz native and professional surfer during the '60s, '70s and '80s, knew he'd have no problem gathering photographs from the 1950s and 1960s; his friends had plenty of those. But the collection he was relying on for 90 percent of the vintage photos from the 1940s and earlier—photos belonging to original Santa Cruz Surfing Club member Harry Mayo—was suddenly off limits, tied up in litigation over rights to the images and the club name.

It may have been a blessing in disguise. Nerve-racking though it was, it forced Hickenbottom to reach out to other surfers, some of whom had moved away from Santa Cruz years before. Slowly the significance of his task dawned on him.

"I didn't realize what a cosmic thing I was doing for the whole surfing community, to be able to talk to all these people and sit in their living rooms and

realize what incredible people were involved in this thing called Santa Cruz surfing," he says. "It's done for posterity, man! It's so bloody cool!"

Hickenbottom, a tanned, good-natured man with laughing hazel eyes and the upright, eternally youthful vibe of the soul surfer, speaks unselfconsciously about the Great Spirit and the role of service when he talks about the book. But it works on a material level, too, as a history of how boards themselves shaped the sport, the evolution from redwood plank to balsa to foam blank to shortboard fostering a constant expansion of maneuverability and athleticism. His book ends in 1968, after a decade of foam longboards had made possible the stylistic riding of the era. "In some ways it was more of an art form than an athletic endeavor," he says. Even the hotdogging—that quaint term—of the day was graceful.

Of course surfing didn't end in 1968. Hickenbottom himself went on to adapt to the shortboard revolution of the 1970s and 1980s, and he's as excited about surfing today, tow-ins and all, as

he ever was. "It's going in all different directions!" he says. "Who knows where it could go?"

Ultimately, though, the book's significance, at least to its author, resides in the story of a developing Santa Cruz surfing community, one that embraces the physically limited along with the supremely gifted. "If someone were to ask me to write the history of Santa Cruz surfing, I'd tear out this page and say, 'Here it is, man!'" says Hickenbottom. He turns to a page with two plates, one of Dick Keating on a monster wave at Steamer Lane and one of Danny Cortazzo helping a young amputee catch a two-foot swell. "You can go into the consciousness, man, and this is where we need to be going. We need to be changing things for the better. And I think the Santa Cruz surfing community is like a metaphor for that."

**THOMAS HICKENBOTTOM** signs copies of 'Surfing in Santa Cruz' (Arcadia; 128 pages; \$21.99) Saturday, Aug. 15, 6-9pm at the Museum of Art and History, 705 Front St., Santa Cruz. Several members of the original Santa Cruz Surfing Club are expected to attend. Second signing is on Tuesday, Aug. 18 at 7:30pm at Bookshop Santa Cruz, 1520 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz.



## COVER | SURFING

Ed Webber, Courtesy Corello & Corello

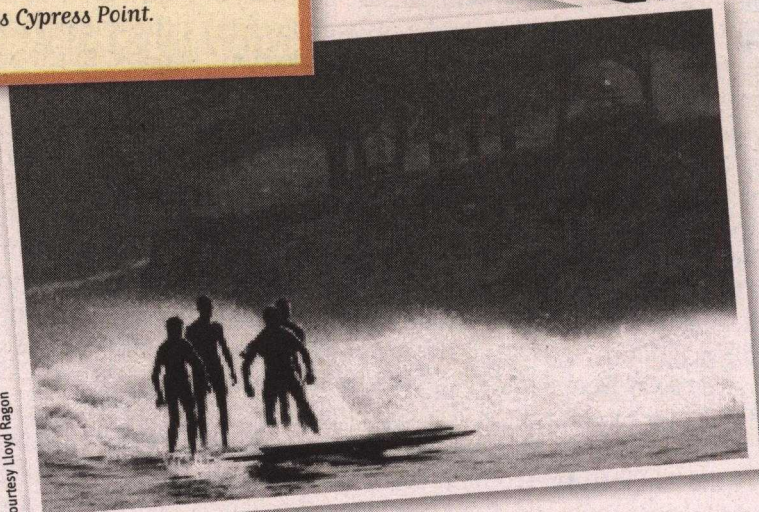


**THE ORIGINALS** Above: Founding Santa Cruz Surfing Club members (left to right) Harry Murray, Harry Mayo, Don "Bosco" Patterson and Norn Handley haul their hollow boards to Cowell's in the summer of 1941.

Right: The barn a block from Cowell's on Bay Street where club members kept their boards. Pictured are Eugene "Jeep" Allen, left, and Fred Hunt. Below: Left to right, Bosco Patterson, Jack Moore, Buster Steward and Harry Murray catch a wave at the Cowell's break, once known as Cypress Point.



Courtesy Fred Hunt

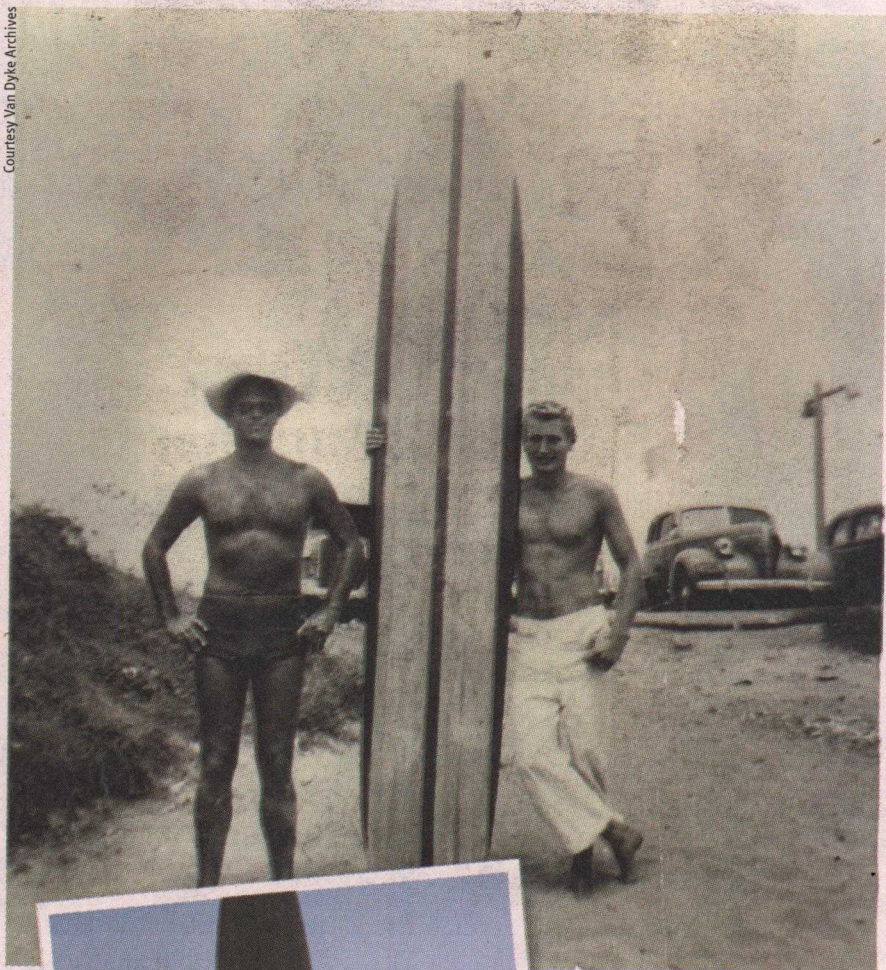


Courtesy Lloyd Ragon



## COVER | SURFING

Courtesy Van Dyke Archives



Courtesy Van Dyke Archives

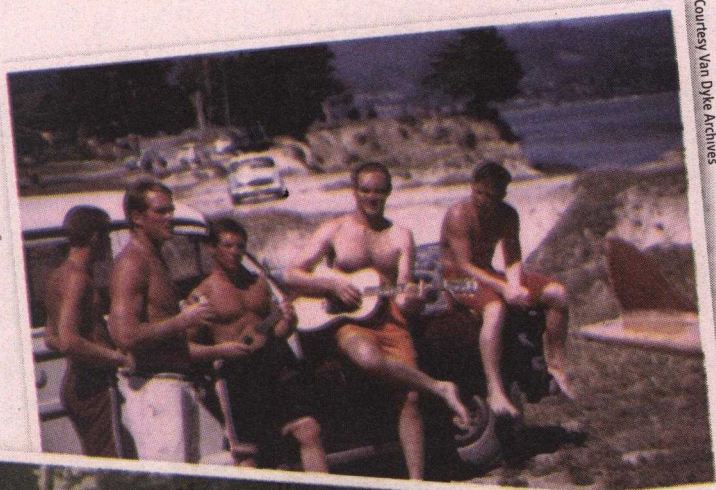


Comic Weekly  
8/1

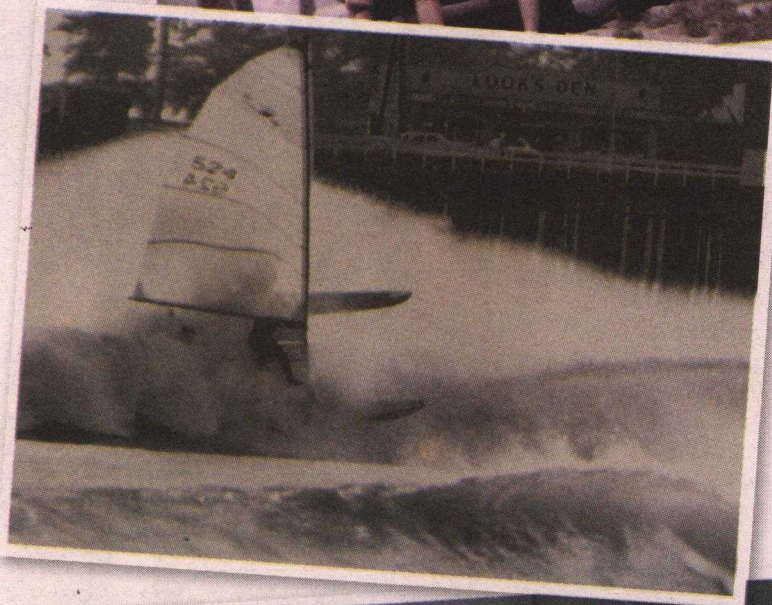
**BRIDGING THE GAP** Top: In a 1954 photo, the legendary Sam Reid (left), nearing age 50, poses with Gene Van Dyke. Hickkenbottom points out that the surfboard is an old balsa-and-redwood model that bridges generations of surfboards, much as Reid and Van Dyke bridged generations of surfers. Bottom: In this 1957 shot, Betty Van Dyke, who was married to Gene, stands at 38th Avenue with her Dale Velzy Pig model and a rare wetsuit jacket brought to her by Jack O'Neill—who was still two years from opening his Santa Cruz surf shop.



Courtesy Van Dyke Archives



Courtesy O'Neill Archives



Courtesy Joel Woods



**SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME** Top: A 1956 shot of Pleasure Point featuring (left to right) Jerry Colfer, Spike Bullis, Johnny Rice (who apprenticed with Dale Velzy and became a respected shaper in his own right), Al Palm and Mike Winterburn (later a shaper at O'Neill's). Middle photo: Early 1960s shot shows Jack O'Neill and Jim Foley (inventor of the short board) at the River Mouth on O'Neill's catamaran. Bottom: In the early 1960s, Joel Woods, one of O'Neill's first shapers, planes the rails of a foam blank.



## COVER | SURFING

### BETTYS ARE BETTER

*Top: Women surfers have made their mark on Santa Cruz. Pictured with several other local surfers are, at left, Earlene Collier, Betty Van Dyke (third from left) and Rosemary Reimers-Rice (third from right). Below: Before there were stairs leading to the cove at Steamer Lane, there was a firehose and an arduous method for moving boards up the cliff. In this 1959 photo Jack O'Neill gives Chubby Mitchell a leg up.*



Courtesy Santa Cruz Surfing Museum

Dave Singletary







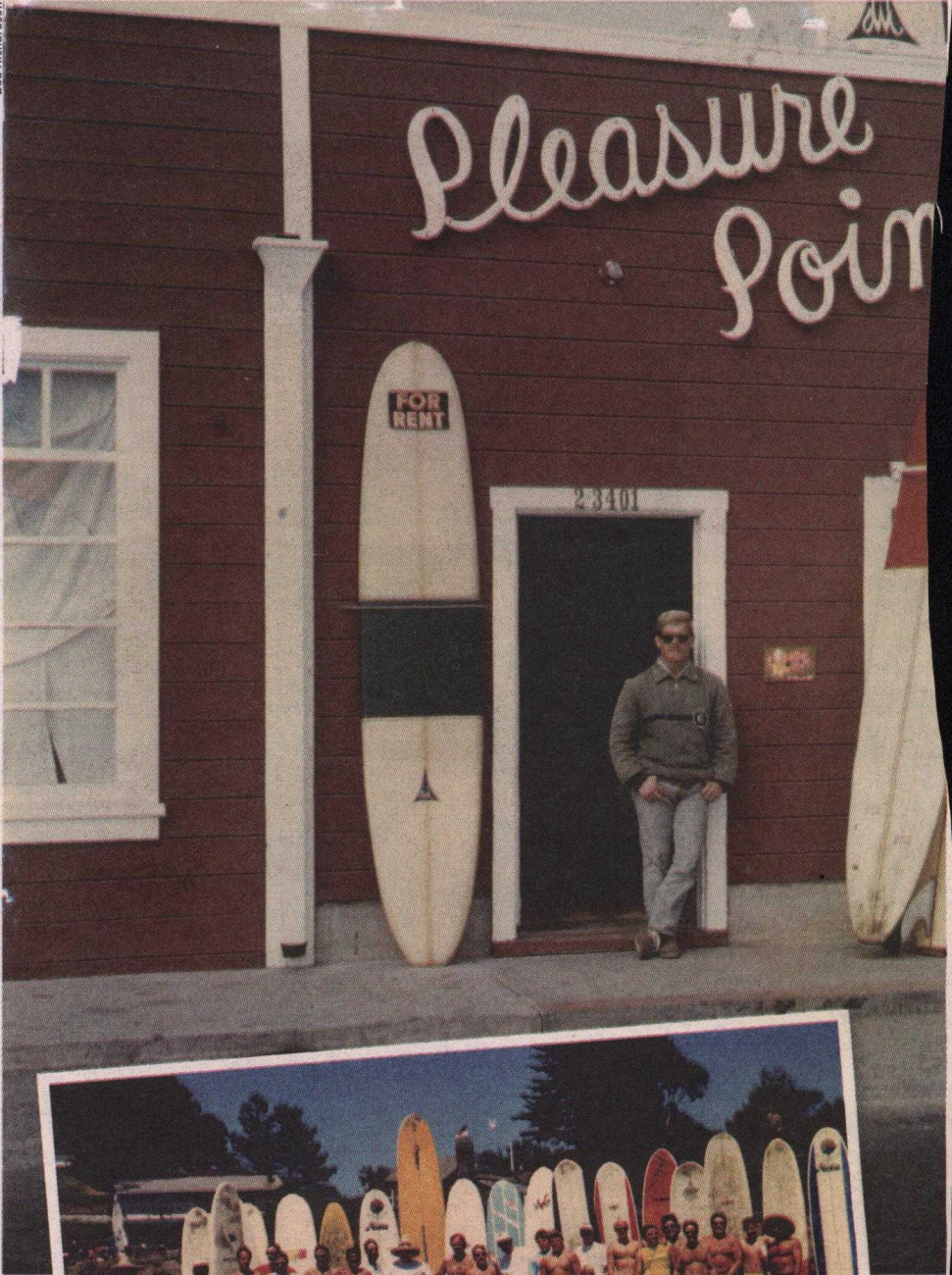
Courtesy Kim W. Stoner



**VALLEY GO HOME** In the early 1960s, surfing got popular and the waves got crowded. The perhaps inevitable result was frustration and a backlash of localism. Left: Crowds aren't a problem for Danny Anderson in this 1966 photo at Steamer Lane.



Bob Richardson



Courtesy Terry Smith





Bob Richardson, Courtesy Rich Nowak

**A CLASSIC** Above: Author Thomas Hickenbottom, pictured in 1966 with bleached hair after having lost a card game, at the Pleasure Point Surf Shop. Left: The annual surf contest between the Moana Makani Surf Club of La Selva Beach and the Rio Surfing Organization is the longest-running meet in the county, says Hickenbottom, and one of the most fun. Right: in an early '60s photo that makes Hickenbottom shudder to this day, Tom Leonard heads into a bad wipeout at the Lane.