

History of the Santa Cruz Surfing Club

By Hal Goody

History records that surfboard riding first began in the Hawaiian Islands hundreds of years ago. It took until the late 1800's and early 1900's before it was introduced to the U.S. Mainland, mostly along the southern coast of California. Surfing became known in the Santa Cruz area when a few young men from the beaches of southern California migrated to the San Francisco Bay Area to seek jobs or to attend college. They already knew how to surf and brought their boards with them. Soon they discovered the beaches of Monterey Bay and the outstanding surf breaking across the outer reefs and sandbars at Cowell's Beach. They also discovered the good surf at the mouth of the San Lorenzo River and at Pleasure Point.



Cypress Point in the late '30s or early '40s

Local teenagers on the beach kept close tabs on how these visitors were able to catch and ride waves with their surfboards. This caused much excitement with the teenagers. By borrowing the visitors' boards and getting some instruction from them, they soon were hooked on the sport and started building their own boards in school wood shops. These early boards were hollow and weighed 60 to 90 pounds.

At this time in history, there were no surf shops, wet suits, leashes, balsa or foam boards, "Giget", surf music, etc. It would be 30 years before the epic surfing movie, "The Endless Summer", was shown.

About 1936, a high degree of camaraderie developed between the visitors and the local teens. This prompted David Steward to invite them to store their surfboards in the basement of his parents' house at Gharkey Street and Lighthouse Avenue. It was here that the idea of forming the Santa Cruz Surfing Club came about. When the Stewards moved to a house on Bay Street with a barn behind it, the visitors were invited to use the loft of the barn not just for storing their boards, but for sleeping as well. Since the barn was only three blocks from Cowell's Beach, it became a regular meeting place for all surfers



The Steward's barn

In 1938, the Santa Cruz jaycees built a board storage house on Cowell's Beach between the Santa Cruz Horseshoe Club and the pier bath house. Space not used by the club members was rented out to non-members. Around the same time, the club rented a former hamburger stand, only 30 feet from the board house, as their clubhouse.



As the club grew and became more serious, they elected officers and had T-shirts and sweat shirts made with the club's logo. Members and their friends spent many happy years growing up on the sands in front of their clubhouse. Beach volleyball and the rigors of surfing resulted in strong and healthy bodies.

Most members served in the armed forces in World War II. Fortunately, they all returned home safely, but things were never the same on the beach again. Many of the members drifted away from the old ways and got on with their lives—college, marriage, families, jobs and responsibilities.

In 1952, the board house was taken down and the club disbanded.[1] The clubhouse itself is now part of a private home on Frederick Street. The club members and their friends have had three reunions since then. The 50th reunion, 1986, was held at the Coconut Grove just a few months after opening the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse Surfing Museum.

In 1992, based on an inspiration of some of the original club members, a surfing sculpture monument was erected on West Cliff Drive at Pelton Avenue. It is dedicated to all surfers, past, present, and future.



Board space in this "board house" was rented for \$1.00 per month.

Listed below are the names of the original Santa Cruz Surfing Club members:

- James S. Alumbaugh
- Bob Gillies
- Harold W. Goody
- Bill Grace
- Terrence Hickey
- Alex Hokamp
- Fred Hunt
- John Larrecq
- Dave Ledyard
- Bill J. Lidderdale, Jr.
- David Littlefield
- Sam A. Maugeri
- Harry Mayo
- Jack Moore
- Harry Murray
- Pete Muttersbach
- Don Patterson
- Alex B. Pedemonte
- Duane Polly
- Lloyd M. Ragon
- Bob Rittenhouse
- Tommy Roussel
- David Steward
- Ted Schultz
- Richard Thompson
- Doug Thorne
- Blake Turner



Photo of the surfing sculpture

The 18-foot bronze sculpture at Lighthouse Point, dedicated May 23, 1992; the surfer is by Tom Marsh; the base is by Brian Curtis.

Footnotes

1. According to an email received 5/11/2008 from Santa Cruz Surfing Club Director of Public Affairs Dan Young, the club never officially disbanded.

Sources

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