

Surfing Culture In Newcastle

Surfing Culture? That can't be right, surely? Culture and surfing? In Newcastle? No I mean, I seem to remember that in my young days culture meant a school excursion to see the ballet, or an orchestra, or a play. And surfing meant smoking crippling amounts of dope, drinking alcohol in quantities comparable to the volume of the Pacific Ocean and lying about on a board waiting for the effects to ease up. Oh, and catching waves, of course.

By gee, they were the days. I recall one occasion when I was cruising around in an EH stationwagon with three or eight other fairly feral surfer-types and the 'Peer Gynt Suite' came on the radio and everyone was too stoned to turn it off. When it got to the part 'In The Hall of the Mountain King' we turned off the headlights and drove into a creek. That could

have been surfing culture. Or there was the time the old surfclub caretaker put 'La Traviata' really loud over the public address system. Now that was really amazing. You could even hear the soprano while you were under water. I suppose some people might even call that 'culture surfing'. At the time, we just called it 'a bloody nasty piece of work', because it attracted the sharks. In fact, my mate Spiggo claimed he felt one nudging his board. But then again, Spiggo rode a kneeboard and was always trying to improve his social standing.

Actually, just thinking back to Spiggo and his almost constant effort to prove he was a real surfer, I seem to remember that there was a fairly loosely defined social hierarchy, which does suggest a certain degree of cultural organisation. In fact, I started thinking

that maybe times have changed. Maybe people are different in Newcastle than back up on the North Coast where I come from. So I decided to check up, and make sure. I interviewed a couple of the local surfers, just to find out the ins and outs of the Newcastle surfing, purely for interests sake before I head back up the coast, to cleaner, emptier waters.

Strangely enough, there was a divergence of opinions between local surfers, about how important the alcohol and dope was; some saying that 'surfers don't do much of that sort of thing anymore' and others who said, a great deal more slowly, that 'uh, hey, uh... nothing's changed you know.' Like, surfing's still the same as ever. Very interesting.

On the subject of the surfing 'pecking order,' there was very little divergence. The loose hierarchy still exists, as it does up the coast and as it did in my young days.

At the very bottom of the surfing scale there are Westie bodysurfers, horrible creatures who flock to beach in masses in hotted-up cars, remove their black 'heavy metal' t-shirts to reveal their white and t-shirt skin pattern. Most surfers justly regard these

monsters as loathsome vermin, strains upon the shoreline and a possible source of all manner of drugs.

Above the Westies are surf-ski riders - purveyors of the lazy art of "Goatboating". Goatboaters, while not as socially handicapped as the Westies, are probably viewed with much greater hate than the Westie - because they 'share' (a term used very loosely) the waves with surfers. Virtually every surfer I spoke to (except Chuck, an enormous ski-riding mate of mine) accused Goatboaters of every form of discourtesy you could possibly imagine - from dropping in on waves or destabilising dunes with their 4 - wheel drive vehicles, to poisoning the ocean with raw sewerage and killing women and dogs, and eating small children. Evidently a species to be avoided at all costs.

Just up from the Goatboaters (but only by a fraction) are "boogie-board" riders . These scourges of the shoreline are only up this high on the list because most of them are children and don't know any better, and are mostly too scared to go out very far. But this doesn't cut much ice with me. I hate them worse than anything in the world, and the older they are, the worse they are. I've declared my own personal,

eternal open season on them. The minute they edge, even fractionally, out of the flagged area on the beach I steer my death-dealing surfboard straight for them, and if I'm very lucky, I even run over them. In fact, this isn't a bad policy for every board rider to adopt. It would teach boogie board riders respect. A good thing indeed!

The next step on the surfers social ladder contains those mutant half-surfers the kneeboarder, otherwise known as "cripples". How fondly (sniff, sigh, giggle) I remember the times when we'd paddle past Spiggo, out for a surf on his kneeboard, and scream out "spit on cripples! spit on cripples!" and deliver a massive oral-oyster dredged up from the very depths of the lungs, straight at his head. Funny how he used to get so agro in the surf. And on shore - because we'd often do the same thing in clubs and pubs at night.

Above the cripples come Clubbies and Malibu Riders. These are lumped together because although their hearts are in the right place, they've gone about things in a manner which can only inspire total repugnance in the normal surfboard rider. Bit sad for Spiggo, because he rides a malibu these days.

By malibu rider I mean riders of the modern - mal. Lazy, twisted semi-weeds who want all the manoeuvrability of a shortboard while still having the stability of your average concrete footpath (I'll talk about riders of old, vintage mals later) Actually, I don't mind clubbies too much myself, I've consumed any number of kegs at surfclubs and if you can sweet-talk the grouchy old caretakers that all surfclubs have, they often let you use the club's bunkroom and showers, a valuable thing when you go a bit feral.

Well, getting towards the top of the list now we come to the things called "KOOKS". These are learner

surfers and, if they're not Westies, they're taken as a necessary evil. After all, everybodys got to learn sometime. However, if the Kook is over about twelve years old, then the level of tolerance decreases, and keeps decreasing as the Kook's age increases.

Nearly at the top are Goofyfooters. These people are the surfing equivalent of boxing's Southpaws, lefthanders, backward surfers etc... In reality, no-one really minds Goofyfooters, and some have even gone on to become World Surfing Champions.

Just a fraction off the apex of surfing hierarchy is the normal short-surfboard rider. These are the folk who ride normally, don't drop-in and, well basically, surf as much as they can.

At the very top, above all the other classes in surfing are the riders of old Malibus. Brave, daring people, almost Gods really, who show absolutely no fear in taking their ancient mals out in any condition. The true Ancient Mal rider shuns leg-ropes (their biggest guns being heavy enough to bend roof-racks) and any other surfing accessory. I've got a mate, Spook, whose life-long project has been to ride a balsawood board, 15 feet long down the banzai pipeline, a truly glorious ambition. Of course, many surfers may detect a hint of bias here, but it's not just because I ride an ancient mal, ancient malibu riders are just plain incredible. Ride an old malibu and find out for yourself.

As with all cultures, the Newcastle Surfing Culture has developed it's own specific value terms for virtually everything from sex to beaches (this includes my favourite - sex on beaches). But, sadly enough, lack of space stops me from setting down a whole lexicon of surfing terms (boredom is another factor in this).

by Duckboy, bastard child of Graham

ARTIES

Arties wear over sized T-shirts and shave rarely. They hang around op shops, looking for the classic



piece of post modernist art deco cubist kitsch. They go to parties and become inebriated on the host's grog, in order to discuss subjects they know nothing about, like modern German philosophy and failed Antarctic expeditions. They eat green lentils and fast foods from really interesting cafe's where they drink buckets of coffee and hope to be discovered. Arties rub their eyes before they go out in order to attain that bleary, tortured look, and smile a lot as if to suggest a sense of humour which is almost inevitably absent. The smile usually reveals poor dental hygiene, mostly Cooks Hill and Newcastle East.

SURFIES

Probably the most widespread overall group, Newcastle has more surfies per head of population than anywhere else in the universe. The dyed blond hair is the first give away. Surfies walk with a wobbly movement as if attempting to drain themselves. They drive station wagons with roof racks and occy straps; wear lots of pink and yellow fluoro colours which they would not be caught dead in after they hang up their boards and have children; live almost exclusively on sausage rolls and bottles of milk with strawberry or chocolate flavouring. The diet has a lot to do with their brown skin colour, as the body attempts to cope with a lack of vital nutrients. The diet also affects their minds, which are generally slow and waterlogged. They speak with a false lisp, as if the tongue is rubbing against the back of the teeth, no doubt attempting to dislodge old, festering bits of sausage and pastry from between gaps. Surfies are obsessed with dressing and undressing in the most public of places, and have severe genital problems as a result of cruel wetsuit designs. Favourite expressions are "Where's the bong?" and "Big night last night!" All suburbs.

