LIBERTY CALL

JO2 Greg Cleghorne photo

Surfin' USA

Compiled by JO2 Greg Cleghorne
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The sound of laughter from Polynesian villagers playing games and splashing in the surf was heard coming from a small island in the Pacific.

Shouts and shrieks of joy filled the air amid the 'schooshing' sound of the constant waves. Family and friends played and rested on golden sand beneath leaning palm trees.

Puffy white clouds drifted lazily across seemingly endless, pale blue skies while sunshine glinted off tropical, azure and teal waters.

On this day, one set of waves was particularly stronger than usual and had life in them.

The village artists and craftsmen noticed dolphins riding and playing in and out of approaching waves and decided to try it for themselves and became some of the world's first body-surfers.

Spending as much time as possible at land's end, on days very similar to this one, they observed a palm tree trunk, downed during a storm, riding in on a wave, like their canoes, and formulated an idea.

Kneeling in their canoes wasn't new, but standing was a little different, a little trickier.

They tried canoe parts, varying in width and length. Many trials and embarrassing errors delighted fellow villagers who roared with laughter when the board riders were thrown, feet to the sky, splashing into the water.

The brief failures didn't deter them from the vision they had of riding those waves like a wild pig during village celebrations. They fashioned variation after variation of wave-riding boards until finally, they developed some that worked.

Surfing is said to have originated in Polynesia. It isn't known who the inventor of the first board was, but surfing became a fun and important social facet of Polynesian culture and is still an important part of that culture today.

Probably the world's first "extreme" sport, surfing is not for the faint of heart.

No other sport combines the awesome power of nature - like bull riding, - but worse - with the raw speed of bobsledding - but worse - mixing the dangers inherent with each.

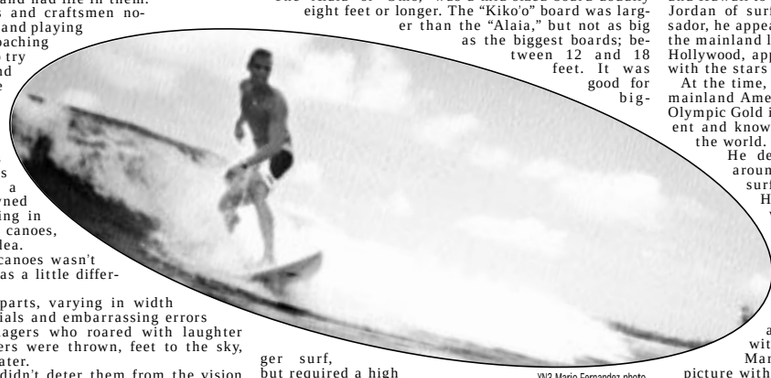
Polynesians developed, lost and regained the art and recreation of surfing and once regained, gave the sport to the rest of the world.

Surfing was widely practiced on the islands of Oahu, Ni'ihau, Moloki'i, Maui and the Big Island of Hawai'i.

Ancient Hawaiians called their hand-crafted apparatus, Papa He'e Nalu - "the wave sliding boards."

The boards varied in size from the short "Paipo" or belly (boogie?) board that ranged in size from two to four feet. Children usually used this board.

The "Alaia" or "Omo," was a mid-sized board usually eight feet or longer. The "Kiko'o" board was larger than the "Alaia," but not as big as the biggest boards; between 12 and 18 feet. It was good for bigger surf, but required a high level of skill to handle.



YN3 Mario Fernandez photo

The "Olo," a very long surfboard reserved for royalty could be as long as 18 to 24 feet long.

Boards of this size were two feet wide, five inches thick and weighed more than 150 pounds. An example of a board of this size is on display at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu.

It is impossible to talk of modern surfing without mentioning the local legend Duke Paoa Kahinu Hulikohola Kahanamoku (1890-1968) or just "Duke," who was born in Waikiki.

The original expression "beach boy" was attributed to Duke and his friends who spent their days at the beach surfing, swimming, shaping surf boards, repairing fishing nets and singing.

Duke didn't smoke, drink, was soft spoken, but was an excellent communicator and quickly established himself as a leader among the "beach boys."

Many years of surfing and canoeing had made him a powerful athlete.

In 1911, at the age of 21, he shattered the 100-yard freestyle record of the day at 55.4 seconds.

He quickly gained nicknames like "the human fish" and "the bronze duke of Waikiki."

He was credited as the man who introduced surfing and Hawaii to the world. Kahanamoku was the Michael Jordan of surfing. Called Hawaii's unofficial ambassador, he appeared with other celebrity athletes around the mainland like Jim Thorpe and spent many years in Hollywood, appearing in films while he rubbed elbows with the stars of the day.

At the time, Hawaii was a distant and exotic land to mainland Americans and Europe, but after Duke won Olympic Gold in Stockholm in 1912, he brought his talent and knowledge of his home islands to the rest of the world.

He demonstrated his talents in his travels around the U.S. and Europe as a swimmer and surfer and brought the world a taste of Hawaii as only an ambassador could. He was also known for his dashing good looks, his grace of movement and charming smile.

Today, young and old alike practice surfing cross-culturally.

Surfers and boogie boarders pack the surf line all along Waikiki's famous beaches, many not knowing the history and legend passing passing beneath them with each Pacific swell.

Many tourists stop for a moment to take a picture with the silent, bronze statue of "The Duke" vigilantly greeting visitors to Waikiki.

Although the age when there were fishing nets to mend on Waikiki beach is gone, the puffy, white clouds, azure and teal waters and palm trees are still there.

Villagers have been replaced by locals and tourists, but if you take a walk on the world-famous beach, it still echoes with old Hawaiian music and, if you're lucky, you may hear the songs of Waikiki beach boys still being sung today.

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Catch the Wave

By YN3 Mario Fernandez
HNN staff writer

Looking for something fun to do during your tour in Hawaii? Why not try surfing?

Imagine yourself sitting on a surfboard waiting for a wave.

Scanning the horizon, you view an oncoming swell. Determined to catch the wave, you paddle furiously towards shore, and are suddenly lifted by a surge of water. You grip the "rails" (sides) of your surfboard, jump to your feet, and race towards the beach powered only by the force of the ocean.

"Surfing is a rush," said Aviation Structural Mechanic 2nd Class Brian Anspach of Patrol Squadron Nine at Barber's Point, while drying off after a surf session at Barber's Point. "People do things to relieve stress; surfing's my thing. If I have a bad day at work, I go surf and I'm totally calm afterwards."

Local experts say that Hawaii provides an excellent opportunity for an aspiring surfer or for someone wanting to try the sport.

"Waikiki is the absolute number one spot to learn how to surf in the world,' says Clyde Aikau, a surf instructor at Waikiki Beach and the brother of legendary Hawaiian surfer Eddie Aikau.

"Waikiki has a fifty-fifty bottom of sand and reef, so you can walk right out, and if you lose your board it won't go really far."

Don't think you're too old to learn how to surf. The sport is enjoyed by people of all ages.

"Surfers are as young as my boy, who is 4 years old, and as old as 90," said Aikau. "You may not catch as many waves when you are older, but you have the same level of enjoyment."

According to Aikau, surfing is deeply rooted in Hawaiian culture.

"The water has always been a very sacred place for the Hawaiian people, both to enjoy and for a peace of mind," he said.

Although its exact origins are unknown, surfing is believed to have been first practiced by Polynesians as early as 2000 B.C. The sport found its way to the Hawaiian Islands through Polynesian migration.

During the late 1700's and early 1800's surfing was a vital part of village life in Hawaii.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, surfing had essentially disappeared. Surfing was ultimately revived because of legendary waterman Duke Kahanamoku (1890-1968).

Kahanamoku astonished the world through his aquatic feats and by winning several Olympic medals. His notoriety allowed him to act as the unofficial ambassador of Hawaii and to popularize the sport of surfing.

" [The ocean] is kind of like a church for us," Aikau said. "It makes us comfortable; it makes us relax. After a hectic workday I grab my surfboard, go surfing, and feel a lot better."

Surfing also provides physical benefits. "It's a great workout," said Aircrew Survival Equipmentman 3rd Class Cam Music of VP-9 who learned how to surf in Cocoa Beach, Fla. "I lost 30 pounds since I've been surfing here," he said.

Both Anspach and Music know many Sailors who surf locally. "I know a lot of Sailors who just work and go home to watch TV," Music said. "Not us. This is what we do, what we talk about, what we live for."

Music's advice to would-be surfers: "Stick with it," he said, "It's good, clean fun."