

BALBOA ISLAND LIVING

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Contestants in the Pacific Coast Surf Board Championship, August 7, 1928. Sherman Library Photograph Collection.

Happiness

Comes in Waves!



history

By Shirley Pepps - President of Balboa Island Museum - Resident Contributor

The music of Dick Dale and the Deltones and the Beach Boys filled the airwaves with songs reflecting the surfing lifestyle, but the history of riding waves on wooden boards is said to have its roots in ancient Polynesian culture. Later in the 1770s, Lieutenant James King finished the memoirs of Captain James Cook, in which sightings of Hawaiians riding waves on surfboards were recorded, thus establishing surfing as a cultural phenomenon in Hawaii.

Here in our backyard, surfing became a popular activity in the early 1900s. In 1912, when well-known Hawaiian competitive swimmer Duke Paoa Kahanamoku was en route to the Summer Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden, he made a stop in Corona del Mar to participate in surfing demonstrations. Little

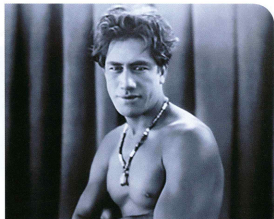
did he know that this trip would so greatly influence our own coastal communities.

Nicknamed "The Duke" and "The Big Kahuna," Kahanamoku is known as the father of modern surfing. Kahanamoku and other pioneer surfers – George Freeth, Tom Blake, and Art and Gerard Vultee – were instrumental in popularizing the sport and doing so right here in our neighborhood. As recorded in their informative book, *Surfing Newport Beach: The Glory Days of Corona Del Mar*, Claudine E. Burnett and Paul Burnett state: "Newport Beach, however, started attracting surfers as early as 1907. George Freeth, who brought the sport to Redondo Beach from Hawaii as a promotion for Henry Huntington's Red Cars, surfed Balboa that year."

Wisconsin-born Tom Blake, a self-proclaimed nomad who is credited as being the inspiration for the stereotypical image



Surfers gather below the cliffs at Corona del Mar for the first Pacific Coast Surfboard Competition, 1928. Surfing Newport Beach: The Glory Days of Corona Del Mar, Claudine E. Burnett and Paul Burnett



Many consider Duke Kahanamoku the father of modern surfing.

of the laid-back California beach bum, had a chance meeting with Kahanamoku in Detroit in 1920. Four years later they met again in Waikiki and a friendship that would see the two transforming the sport of surfing began. The Duke imparted his surfing practices to Blake, and using those methods as a springboard, Tom went on to create new techniques in board manufacturing, including hollowing outboards to make them lighter and creating shorter surfboards with a "fin."

In 1928, Blake came to Corona del Mar to compete in the first Pacific Coast Surfboard Championship. The competition was hosted by the twelve-member Corona del Mar Surf Club, the only surf club on the Pacific coast at the time. (Unfortunately, Kahanamoku was filming a movie and unable to attend.) As reported in the July 16, 1928, *Long Beach Press-Telegram*: "The Corona Del Mar Surfboard Club, which claims to be the largest organization of its kind in the world, will hold a championship surfboard riding tournament at the Corona Del Mar beach at the entrance to Newport Harbor on Sunday, August 5." And in the August 5, 1928 edition: "Preparations have been completed for the Pacific Coast surfboard riding championship tournament, to be held at

Corona Del Mar, the entrance to Newport Harbor today. Part of the entrance to the harbor is said to be only surpassed by some Hawaiian beaches for surfboard riding."

Corona del Mar remained a popular surfing destination in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Newport Harbor was recognized as the best surfing location on the West Coast. However, due to a tragic drowning accident in July 1926, plans began to make the harbor safer, and beginning in 1934, rock jetties were created, putting an end to the surf break at Corona del Mar. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it resulted in the formation of the famous (or infamous) Wedge.

From ancient huge wooden boards to the latest sustainable plant-based boards used by Agave Surf surfboards (the latest technology using a 100% agave core), surfing has come a long way and continues to be a favorite exhilarating sporting experience to surfers of all ages all over the world.

To learn more about the history of surfing and some of the sport's most famous players, please visit the Balboa Island Museum!



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