

From lifesaving to 'soul surfing'

BY PAUL BYRNES

Paul Byrnes tracks the history of surfing and surf movies in Australia.

Breaking the Bonds

The history of Australian surfing parallels Australia's own coming of age in the 20th century. As in *Puberty Blues* (movie 1981; TV series 2012–14), it's the story of youngsters doing what they shouldn't, breaking the rules, searching for a different sense of identity and involvement. Movies arrived in Australia towards the end of the 19th century, and they brought a new sense of freedom and wonder. Surfing did a similar thing a few years later, so it was inevitable that they would get together. There was a sense of liberation in both forms, and Australia was a country looking to break the bonds of the old world.



St Kilda Esplanade, 1914. NFSA title: 9182

In 1901, when Australia became a federation of states, Australians were not allowed to swim in the sea in most places in daylight hours. Many people did, but they risked prosecution. That was challenged in 1902 by the editor of a Manly newspaper, William H Gocher, who announced that he would swim at noon on Sundays in September. He was duly arrested, although not charged. The laws crumbled, swept away by a tide of public opinion.

By 1903, sea bathing was legal, or at least more legal. Some councils still tried to control it, segregating the sexes and limiting the times. At St Kilda in Melbourne, a major hub of open-air entertainment at the time, the council decreed that no bathing would happen anywhere on the beach after 10am on Sundays, or any time on Christmas Day or Good Friday. Those times explain what was driving the prohibition – people were supposed to be in church. In general, the churches saw public bathing in the sea, unsegregated, as the work of the devil. In a sense, they were right.

The Birth of Surf Lifesaving

Going to the sea, stripping off your clothes and bathing near-naked were certainly pleasures of the body. Doing it with members of the opposite sex was bound to lead to something, and it did: a major cultural shift. When Australians took to the water, there was no turning back. Our gaze shifted from the great red interior to the beautiful blue coastline, peering out.

This trend of immersion was not confined to Australia. In Britain, doctors had been recommending sea-bathing therapies for more than a century, and railways made going to the seaside affordable. In Britain, sea bathing took courage, given the temperatures, but in Australia the water was warm. It was inevitable that the population would break these Victorian-era rules. Australians had a word for prohibitions against a good time – wowsers. After Federation, hordes of Australians rebelled against the iron grip of the 19th century moralists, the wowsers.

The problem with this new freedom was that many people could not really swim and quite a lot drowned. Groups of young volunteers came together to help save them. Thus, the surf lifesaving movement was born, an Australian invention. Argument still rages about which club was first – Bronte in 1903, or its near neighbour, Bondi. By 1907, 14 clubs, most of them in Sydney, banded together to form the Surf Bathing Association of New South Wales – the forerunner to the Surf Lifesaving Association of Australia.

Travelogue of Eastern States: Bondi Surf Carnival, c1929. NFSA title: 40456

The clubs have had a major impact on Australian beach life, saving thousands of lives and developing a culture of fitness around swimming, but they did not originate in the same spirit of freedom that drove people into the water. In fact, they were run on militaristic lines, in an attempt to standardise training methods. Marching up and down the beach like soldiers became a competitive activity in surf carnivals. The clubs strived for a sense of discipline, duty and collective effort, rather than individualism. They were voluntary organisations with a strong social element, and a sense of ownership of the beaches.

The Bronzed Aussie

From the beginning, lifesavers were the police of the beach, enforcing segregation of the sexes and whatever local council by-laws decreed. The authoritarianism would lead in the 1960s to a major rupture, as board surfers rebelled against 50 years of tradition. That schism has never quite healed.

There was another division, between men and women. The surf clubs did not start out as wholly male bastions. Before the First World War, some women were members, but returning soldiers after 1918 saw them off the premises. By the early 1920s, Australian surf clubs were for men only, unless it was for fundraising, cooking and socialising. Women who wanted to learn the skills generally had to form their own clubs, and they did. They had their own carnivals and

competitions, and that barrier was not torn down until 1980, when the surf clubs were forced to admit females as full members, including as patrolling lifesavers.

The rise of the surf clubs introduced a new kind of masculine hero. In the 19th century, the Australian hero was a man of the bush, a master horseman, a man in a felt hat. He arose to deal with the great Australian anxiety of the 19th century, the interior, where climate was hostile, just like the Aborigines. The Man of the Bush tamed the wilderness, the blackfellas and the climate, turning forest into field, storing the water and producing food and wealth. That heroic vision did not go away, but with the invention of newsreels around 1908, cinema audiences were confronted with a man wearing not much more than his underwear.



Lifesavers: Cryst-O-Mint Flavour, 1925. NFSA title: 16961

The Bronzed Aussie, as we now know him, is a result of losing the hat, the horse and most of his clothes. These young men were made physically fit by their swimming and running training, rather than farming or work. They were urban heroes, just as Australia was becoming an increasingly urban country.

If you wanted to see the human body before 1903, you went to an art gallery. After 1903 in Australia, you went to the beach and if you couldn't go there, you could go to the pictures. Newsreels were in love with the beaches and their guardians, the lifesavers. Swimmers were required to wear modest clothing, full neck-to-knee swimsuits, often with modesty skirts in front. Lifesavers got away with less, because they enforced the rules. They were quickly recognised as sex symbols, especially by advertisers.

The young woman in the *Lifesavers: Cryst-O-Mint Flavour* advertisement (pictured), made in 1925 for use in cinemas, decides to swim so that she can attract the lifesaver. She is in about as much difficulty as if she stayed on the beach. The ad shows clearly that commercial interests already understood what the beach represented – the same thing that the churches had feared before 1902: sex, sex, sex.

The Thrill of Danger

The other attraction for the newsreels was danger. Surf clubs trained in surfboats, a modified form of a 19th century whaling boat, and when the surf was big, these boats were hard to handle. The newsreels loved those days. There are literally scores of scenes of surfboats in heavy surf, overturning, out of control, careening towards the beach in surf carnivals for the entertainment of those on the beach – if not the safety of those in the water.

One of the best of these was during the first visit to Australia of Queen Elizabeth II in 1954. The Queen and her husband, Prince Philip, watched a surf carnival at Bondi, with a heavy surf running. The surfboat race that day provided memorable footage for the first colour feature shot in Australia.

The Queen in Australia: Surf Carnival at Bondi Beach, 1954. NFSA title: 10373

The boats have never been the main means of beach rescue, although they were used to patrol for sharks. When a boat on patrol outside the breakers saw a shark, the rowers raised their oars, a signal to the lifeguards on the beach to ring the bell. Bathers were out of the water in a flash, awaiting the ‘all clear’. This fear of sharks was close to hysteria in Australia and it resulted in some cruel practices. Thousands of sharks were killed along the Australian coastline in the belief that the only good shark was a dead shark.

The Father of the Surfboard

Surfing on boards originated in Hawaii, where it was an ancient practice, reserved for royalty. Albie Thoms in his book *Surfmovies: The History of the Surf Film in Australia* (2000) says that Charles Paterson brought an Hawaiian board to Australia from Honolulu in 1909. He became president of the Surf Bathing Association, but no one was able to ride it, ‘and it had become an ironing board’.



Evolution of the Australian Crawl, c1952. NFSA title: 15578

Australians did know how to swim, inventing their own stroke, the Australian Crawl, which spread to Hawaii, where a young man called Duke Kahanamoku became an expert. In 1912, he went to the Olympic Games in Stockholm, where he defeated the Australian champion, Cecil Healy, to become the world record holder in the 100 metres freestyle. Healy invited Kahanamoku to visit Australia, and the Hawaiian arrived here in late 1914, shortly after war broke out in Europe.

He came without a surfboard, because he had heard that they were banned here. That was true on some beaches a few years earlier. American surfer and writer Alexander Hume Ford visited Manly in 1908 and was told that boards were banned, which must mean that there were boards of some kind in use on some beaches before Paterson's Hawaiian board arrived.

Kahanamoku shaped a board at a local timber yard and gave a demonstration at Sydney's Freshwater Beach (Harbord) on Wednesday 23 December 1914. Newspapers reported the demonstration just after Christmas, with photographs. One paper described the board as '8 ft in length, 3 ft in width, 100 lbs in weight and narrowed at one end'.

This demonstration has become mythical in Australian surfing lore. Even if it was not the first attempt to ride a board in Australia, it was a revelation for those on the beach, in terms of skill. Kahanamoku is generally regarded as the father of surfboard riding in Australia and in California, where his demonstrations had a similar effect. Cecil Healy, the champion swimmer who invited Kahanamoku to Australia, did not live to see the full impact of this visit. He enlisted in late 1915 and died in France in 1918.

Our Swimming Champions Become Movie Stars

By the 1920s, there were few countries in which going to the beach, lying in the sun and surfing were as entrenched as in Australia. Any reserve we had felt 20 years earlier was gone. Most of the opposition from churches had retreated, swimming skills had improved, and the surf lifesaving club network stretched around the country. The Australian Crawl, which should probably be called the Solomon Islands Crawl, was by now world famous.



A Daughter of the Gods, 1919. NFSA title: 585888

Australians had for some time been producing swimming champions, some of whom became movie stars. In 1905, [Annette Kellerman](#) was the first woman to attempt to swim the English Channel (she failed). She went to the United States, where she popularised the one-piece bathing suit, a much more daring costume than was generally worn, for which she was arrested in Boston in 1907. She is credited with inventing synchronised swimming. By 1916, she was making movies without the costume. She was one of the first actresses to do a nude scene, in Fox Film Corporation's *A Daughter of the Gods* (1916).

[Snowy Baker](#) was another champion swimmer who went to the US, although his career in front of the camera there was less successful. He made five feature films in Australia between 1918 and 1921. In the first of these, made in the final months of the war, he shows off his diving and swimming skills to save a maiden in distress. She has been tied to a rock in the ocean and will drown on the incoming tide if he doesn't get to her quickly.

Australian cinema was much slower than the newsreels to exploit the attractions of beach scenes. *The Enemy Within* (1918) is one of the few silent films with scenes shot on, or beside, the sea. This is a curious absence in our silent cinema.

Most Australian films of the period turned their back on the coast, looking inward towards the centre, clinging to the dramatic ideas of the 19th century. They are typically stories of pioneers such as the Rudd family, chopping a meagre living from the bush in *On Our Selection* (1920). Even in the early sound era, when Ken G Hall began his amazingly successful run of features at Cinesound, there are few scenes at the beach, perhaps because of the difficulty of getting good sound.

One film does stand out, because it was a cause célèbre. *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, made in 1934, had ingénue Charlotte Francis swimming in the ocean in a shockingly brief swimming costume, which she then wriggled out of behind a rock. Her character went on to seduce a local pastor, proving yet again that there was a connection between sun, sand and sex. The scandal had the desired result in publicity, and was fully orchestrated by Hall, a former publicist.

Evolution of the Surfboard

Australian surfers after 1915 rode heavy planks, in the style of Duke Kahanamoku, until the hollow board arrived during the 1930s. These were much longer, up to 16 feet, but much lighter. Now known as 'toothpicks', they were made from plywood stretched over a frame. In the newsreel *Thrill of the Surf* (1949, below), we see the construction of the boards, most of which were made by their own riders at the surf clubs. The riders were club members; they could not easily transport the boards away from the beach, so they were stored in the club. 'Surfers' and 'clubbies' were the same people at this stage.

Thrill of the the Surf, 1949. Courtesy: Cinesound Movietone Productions. NFSA title: 61273

We see here how they were ridden, and their limitations. Turning was at best accidental, although the craft was versatile when used with a paddle. The surf ski was invented by two Port Macquarie brothers, Harry and Jack McLaren. They are said to have used an early form of it for their oyster beds in 1912. It was later adapted for use by surf clubs, being both faster and more manoeuvrable than a surfboat.

We also see the coming problem, towards the end of the clip, when a line of riders takes off together. Many in the surf clubs considered this kind of activity dangerous, especially to swimmers. As surfing became more popular, clubs became more authoritarian. The camaraderie between the rescuers and the recreational surfer was about to shatter.

Rise of the Surf Movie

The revolution began in 1956, the same year that television arrived. Both were a consequence of Melbourne hosting the Olympic Games. Surf lifesaving was a demonstration sport in Melbourne, and teams came from around the world. After the games, members of the American and Hawaiian surf lifesaving teams came to Sydney to show the latest surfing techniques on their new lightweight balsa boards, finished with fibreglass. Duke Kahanamoku returned as the manager of the Hawaiian team. Newsreel cameras showed him meeting Claude West, the kid he gave his board to 42 years earlier.

The new American style of surfing, known as hotdogging, was a revelation to Australian surfers. Cinesound made a propaganda film, sponsored by Ampol, to encourage youth to join their local surf club. Instead, the film hastened the split between surfers and the clubs, because the footage was so exciting.



Service in the Sun, 1957. Courtesy: Cinesound Movietone Productions. NFSA title: 50657

Filmmaker and historian Albie Thoms describes these few minutes of surfing, by Californians Greg Noll, Mike Bright and Hawaiian Tom Zahn, as ‘one of the most significant sequences recorded in an Australian surfing film... that forever altered the way Australians approached the riding of waves’.

The Americans sold their boards to Australians when they left. The Australian surfboard manufacturing industry took off soon after, as new companies sprang up in Brookvale, NSW, to cope with demand for copies of the new 'Malibu' surfboards. The Americans' boards weighed around 10 kg, far less than a toothpick board. They were shorter, lighter and more manoeuvrable, and the Americans had developed new ways to ride them.

Australian surfers had hardly seen American surfing at this stage, because the surf movie did not exist in Australia. The newsreels covered Australian boardriding, but they rarely showed footage from overseas. Mike Zahn, the blonde Hawaiian who appears in *Service in the Sun* (1957, pictured), told the young Queenscliff surfer Bob Evans about the surf movies being made in the US and Hawaii by Bud Browne and Bruce Brown. Greg Noll brought a camera with him on that trip. He shot footage in Australia, which he screened for audiences back in California. Evans picked up the idea of making an Australian film. The modern Australian surf movie, if we define it as a film devoted solely to surfing, was born out of his conversation with Mike Zahn.

Bud Browne had been making 16mm surf films since around 1953, showing them at Californian high schools and auditoriums. He was one of the first to film the big swells on the north shore of Oahu in winter. Evans invited him to show them in Australia. He arrived in 1957 with two films that he cut together on the boat. *Surfing in Hawaii* (1957) and *The Big Surf* (1957) premiered at the Queenscliff Surf Club. According to Albie Thoms, there were more than 600 people there; one was a teenage surfer from Whale Beach, Paul Witzig, who would become one of the most significant surf filmmakers of the next decade in Australia. The films attracted huge crowds wherever they were shown. Bud Browne also shot footage of Australian surfers, which he edited on his return to California. *Surf Down Under* (1958) was the first feature-length movie about Australian surfing.

Evans began to film Australian surfers, working with surfboard shaper Joe Larkin, who owned an 8mm camera. Larkin soon acquired a 16mm Bolex, a Swiss camera that was capable of much better results, although he couldn't actually see what he was shooting through the viewfinder (it was non-reflex). This camera allowed takes of 25 seconds, slow motion, and had three lenses. The Australian surf film had begun.

'He's My Blond Headed Stompie Wompie Real Gone Surfer Boy' by Little Pattie, 1963.
Courtesy: HMV EA 4604. NFSA title: 31530

Evans was soon taking films by American filmmakers up and down the coast, screening them in surf clubs and halls. He was shooting Australian footage for American filmmakers, items for Australian television sports shows and reporting on radio about surf conditions. From the early 1960s, he began organising dances at the surf clubs, to take advantage of the new craze for surf music. The music had exploded worldwide in 1961. Australian bands were soon twanging like Dick Dale and stomping at Maroubra with Little Pattie (listen to audio clip, above).

Fighting on the Beaches

Surfers began to experience serious conflicts, both with the 'clubbies' and with the kids who called themselves rockers. The rockers, descended from the 'bodgies' and 'widgies', wore

American clothes and liked American rock'n'roll, not surf music. Their cult had been around longer, and they felt the same sense of entitlement to the beaches as all Australians. That was part of the premise of Australian beach culture: equality of access. The tensions erupted in 1963 with weekend fights at the stomp dances.

At the root of this tension, there is a class division: rockers were working class and saw surfers as different, although many surfers were just as working class, and just as willing to stake a claim to territory. This conflict did not disappear, even if the subcultures became less distinguishable. The Cronulla riots, in 2005, have their origins in the same tensions – ‘westies’ clashing with surfers, with the added tension of anti-Muslim sentiment after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US.

All Quiet on the Surfie-Rocker Front, 1963. Courtesy: Cinesound Movietone Productions. NFSA title: 28996

Within the surf clubs, dislike of surfers had been growing since 1956. Older club members hated the emphasis on fun instead of duty, and they reacted by victimising and punishing surfers, confiscating boards that ran into swimming areas, and trying to license surfboards. These tensions got physical at times.

The enmity between club members and surfers went way back, even to 1908 when the first surfboards were banned by clubs. American teen culture – music, movies, surfing – challenged all authority by its nature. The clubs reacted with more authoritarianism, driving the kids away faster, although some of the clubbies, like Bob Evans, could see the future. Evans was Australia's first surfing entrepreneur. He started *Surfing World*, one of the first Australian surf magazines.

Beating the Yanks

In May 1964, Bob Evans organised the first surfing world championship, held at Manly Beach in Sydney. Ten of the world's best surfers competed, with invitees from the USA, Hawaii, Great Britain, Peru, France, New Zealand and South Africa. The contest was partly a grudge match. Hawaiian surfers believed it was their sport, Californian surfers felt they were the best in the world, but Australia had Midget Farrelly, who had been victorious in early 1963 in Hawaii in the unofficial world championship, the invitation-only Makaha contest. He went back to Hawaii at the end of that year and lost in the final against Hawaiian star Joey Cabell. The Manly contest six months later was going to sort out the pecking order and restore Australian pride. Farrelly won with a confident display in the finals, defeating Hawaii's Joey Cabell and Mike Doyle from the USA.

There were wider forces at work in these waters. Australian society was changing. In 1964, the dominant cultural influence for the previous 20 years had been America, rather than Britain, even with the long reign of Robert Menzies, a committed Anglophile, as Australian prime minister

(from 1949 to 1966). The war had brought Australians into contact with Americans and there was fascination, as well as unease.

Australian surfers were more heavily influenced by this Pacific culture than the wider community. We had adopted surfing from Hawaii and then new styles of surfboard from the visiting stars in 1956. Even the style of riding was derived from Americans and Hawaiians. Surf culture on Australian beaches before then had been more homegrown. Surf lifesaving, surfboats, surf skis, even the humble rubber mat known as a surf-o-plane, were all Australian inventions.

The traditionalists saw surfing as an American import, and they were right. It was as American as Marlon Brando riding a motorcycle in *The Wild One* (1953) and Elvis Presley singing rock'n'roll on the radio. Television itself was becoming dominated by American programming. The age of the teenager was another American import.

In 1964, beating the Americans at surfing really meant something. We wanted to beat 'the Yanks' in the same way we always wanted to beat 'the Poms' at cricket. If there was a national inferiority complex, as some historians argue, it came out in competitions like this.

Shaping the Future

By 1966, Australian surfing was beginning to assert a new independence. Australian shapers had struck out in new directions and the centre of innovation was no longer 'over there'. Bob McTavish, who had grown up in Brisbane, started shaping boards in 1961. He became relentlessly experimental, working with eccentric American inventor and surfer George Greenough on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Greenough studied the design of fish and dolphins, copying the shape of their fins. McTavish made boards shorter and thinner, experimenting with scooped-out bottoms and Greenough's fins.



High on a Cool Wave, 1968. NFSA title: 16296

In Collaroy surfer Nat Young, who would soon win the 1966 world championship rematch in San Diego, California, they had the most exciting young surfer in the world as a test pilot. Bob Evans and Nat Young visited Greenough and McTavish at Noosa Heads in mid-1966. McTavish

remembers them being around for about ten days, during which Evans filmed the three innovators having fun, often on the same wave. In *High on a Cool Wave* (1968, pictured) Greenough is on a kneeboard, his famous scooped out 'spoon'.

McTavish, now a legendary shaper, says the footage in *High on a Cool Wave* represents the apex of what could be done on a traditional longboard. Everything would soon change, as he started to make his boards shorter and shorter, aiming to 'go vertical', to get maximum access to the power of the wave. Similar ideas were developing in Hawaii and the US, and Australian and American surfers were now visiting each other every year. The question of who did what first has become murky, but there is no question that what we see here was an historic partnership.

When this film was shot, through 1966 to early 1968, surfing had already become a lifestyle, not simply a sport. The combination of elements – the music, the light, the gracefulness of the technique, and the final narration – are all about giving a sense of the desirability of that lifestyle. The early American films were based on an entertaining form of travelogue, with a comic narration and ironic humour. The Australian surfing movie was becoming more serious, like Australian surf design.

In a sense, what we see here is the marketing of a lifestyle, even if that lifestyle was against the idea of marketing. Surfing has always had a tension between commerce and art. Nat Young's skill on these waves is a form of artistic expression, not just a physical one. American surfers were not riding like this in 1966. Young is trying to use the full face of the wave, but with elegance and drive in his style, a definite aesthetic. McTavish and Greenough were trying to invent the boards that would allow them all to do that. No-one was doing it solely for the money. For Bob Evans, the returns on each film simply allowed him to make another film the next year, with the best surfers he could muster, most of whom did not get paid.

A New Morning

Even before the era of professionalism had begun we can see that 'change is gonna come'. This was 1968, Australia was fighting in Vietnam alongside our 'American cousins', many American cities were burning, Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King had been assassinated. Hundreds of thousands of people in Australia would soon take to the streets in opposition to the Vietnam War. Pop music was changing and so were the recreational habits of young people. Surfers had always been open to experimentation with drugs. Marijuana and LSD were probably more common in surfing than in the wider youth community, and we can see their influence in some of the films made in the early 1970s.



Morning of the Earth, 1972. NFSA title: 4478

Everything has changed by now: the shape of the board, the length of the board, the style of surfing, the position for filming, but more particularly, the ethos. Producer David Elfick and director and cameraman Alby Falzon made *Morning of the Earth* (pictured) in 1972, and it was like a manifesto for ‘soul surfing’, the new way of thinking. They were influenced by the counterculture, and changes in the style of surfing films such as *Evolution* from 1969, in which Paul Witzig got rid of all narration.

They were also exposed to a new underground film culture in Sydney, centred on the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op and Ubu Films, where Albie Thoms was making his mark with short experimental films like *Bolero* (1967). *Morning of the Earth* (1972) was conceived like a surfing opera, with long sequences cut together to one song, the poetry of the images matching the desires of the audience for a transcendental experience. The ‘soul surfer’ idea had been coming for some years, partly led by Nat Young, who dropped out of competitive surfing in the late 1960s and moved to the north coast of New South Wales. Many other surfers followed, looking for a different way to live.

Crystal Voyager (excerpt), 1973. NFSA title: 107

This poetic, psychedelic period in surf filmmaking reached its apotheosis in 1973 in *Crystal Voyager*, in which David Elfick made what he calls ‘the first surfing biopic’. It is a portrait of George Greenough in his full creativity, as inventor, surfer and theorist. The final sequence is justifiably famous – a 23-minute film within the film, cut to a song by Pink Floyd, then the biggest band in the world. Greenough had invented a way of taking the camera inside the wave, by strapping a waterproof housing on his back. The images were incredibly beautiful and completely new. No surf film had ever come close to replicating the feeling of being inside the curl.

David Elfick had co-founded the surf magazine *Tracks*, and would go on to become one of the most important Australian film producers (*Newsfront*, 1978; *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, 2002). To get the rights to the Pink Floyd song, he flew to London and hired a cinema to show the Greenough

footage to the band. They granted him rights to use the song, in return for use of that footage in their concerts. He paid no fee, an astonishing testament to his powers of persuasion.

A Longing for the Sea

Australian surf movies have spread out in all directions in recent years. There are documentaries about Aboriginal surfing (*Us Deadly Mob*, 2005), women in surfing (*Women in the Surf*, 1986), tribal gangs (*Bra Boys*, 2007), big wave hunters (the 3D *Storm Surfers*, 2012) and Australian beach art (*The Beach*, 2000), many of them represented on this site.



Women in the Surf, 1986. NFSA title: 277528

There are animations (*Living with Happiness*, 2001) and horror movies (*Long Weekend*, 1978) and experiments in narrative (*Palm Beach*, 1979). There are also influential mainstream features like *Puberty Blues* (1981), in which the surf culture of an Australian seaside suburb was exposed with lacerating humour. The range of styles is extraordinary, but they all express a similar emotion at some level: a longing for a connection with the sea.

The early Australian newsreels took a combative, fearful approach to that relationship, with the boats battering their way through big waves and lifesavers snatching swimmers from the jaws of death. That has changed, to some extent. Surf movies have certainly become more obsessed with big waves, but the relationship is expressed in a different way: there is more respect. We now admit a spiritual dimension to the relationship, something that surfers have known all along.

Citations

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