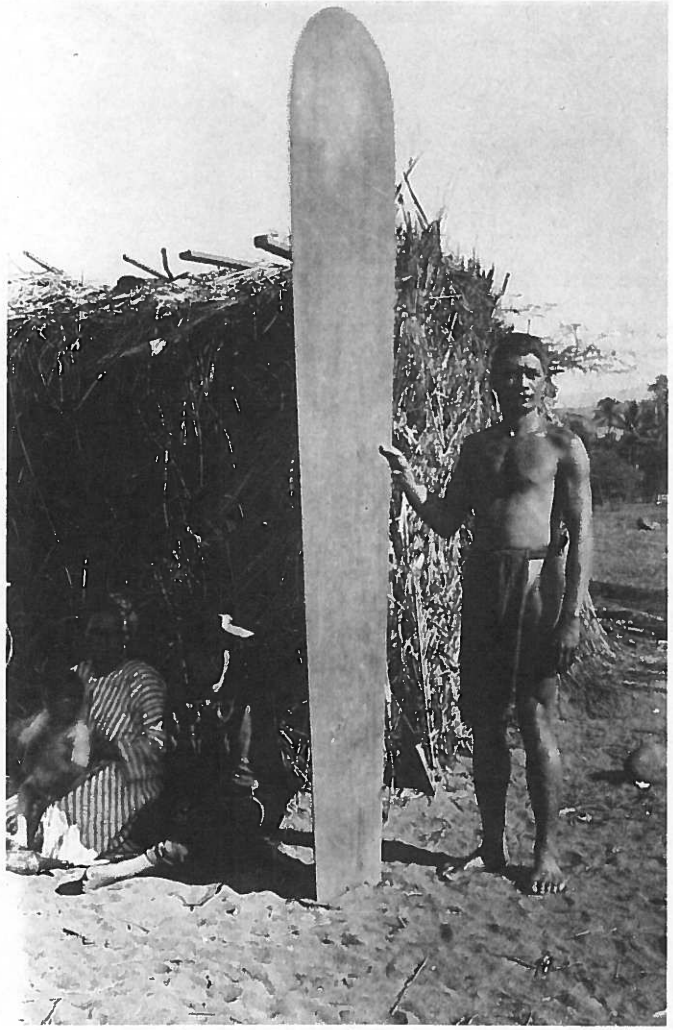
Surfing

A History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport

Ben Finney and James D. Houston

Pomegranate Artbooks San Francisco



ONE OF THE FIRST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPHS OF A SURFER WITH HIS BOARD, C. 1890. PHOTO COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

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Foreword

The more things change, it has often been said, the more they remain the same. And so it is with the world of surfing, which in some ways has changed enormously in the years since this book was first published in 1966.

A simple device like the ankle-leash, for example, has eliminated the long swims that used to consume half of every surfer's energy and time in the water. And thanks to continuous experiments with board design, maneuvers are possible now that surfers in the mid 1960s could only dream about. Consider the arrival of the "Short Board." Few surfers had seen a board less than nine or ten feet long, the standard length since soon after World War II. And those ten-foot boards had been a great liberation from the unwieldy planks of the 1930s. The boards that began to appear on beaches in the late sixties harked back to a shorter version the early Hawaiians had called *alaia*—seven, six, sometimes five feet long. With these new models came later take-offs, more radical turns, and virtuoso stunts like a 360-degree whirl in the midst of a high-speed ride.

Meanwhile, thanks to the ongoing spirit of adventure, enhanced by the insulating pleasures of the wetsuit, surfers have tried waves along just about every surfable coastline on the planet, from Costa Rica to Bali's Kuta Beach, from Tierra del Fuego to British Columbia and beyond. As both a sport and an industry, surfing is now more internationalized than ever, with a professional circuit and contests staged around the world.

And yet, for all the advances in equipment and technique, certain elemental features haven't changed much at all. The forces that cause inviting swells to hump offshore are the same as they have been for countless millennia—the inexorable push of wind and water. From island to island, from continent to continent, the same reefs still wait submerged. Day after day surfers jockey for position as a wave rises to block out half the sky. They paddle hard and feel the rush and lift of nature's mysterious power, leap to their feet and cut the foamy trail that always disappears behind them. And after all the exploring of the world's many shorelines, Hawai'i continues to be the global headquarters for this ancient sport and pastime.

This was the first book to chart surfing's Pacific origins in the context of Polynesian culture. Its main outline was conceived and developed by Ben Finney as his master's thesis in anthropology at the University of Hawai'i. Much of the material was revised by James D. Houston, who also added new details and interpretations. For this thirtieth-anniversary edition, a number of seldom-seen drawings and early photos have been added, along with appendixes of vintage writings on the subject, from the unedited log of Captain Cook's second-in-command, Lt. James King, to Jack London's lively account of "A Royal Sport," which first appeared in 1907. A few historical and cultural details have been updated (e.g., pronunciation marks for Hawaiian terms and the use of

Polynesian place names, such as Rapa Nui and Aotearoa in lieu of Easter Island and New Zealand), but beyond these, we have decided not to expand the original text. We hope it can be read as a detailed history as well as a view of this sport at a particular moment in its evolution. Thus, our description of catching a wave (pages 16–19) predates the "Short Board" and the invention of the ankle-leash. And our account of surfing's decline on the outer Hawaiian Islands predates the rediscovery of famous breaks on Maui, Hawai'i, and elsewhere as the sport continued to spread outward from Waikīkī.

In the mid 1960s surfing in Tahiti seemed a forgotten skill. But then surfers from Australia, California, and Hawai'i began bringing their boards to Tahiti to surf, intriguing young Tahitians. Some say that the first of them to try modern surfing got their start by buying boards from Australians who needed the money to fly back home. By the 1980s young Polynesians were surfing all around Tahiti and the neighboring islands, and a Tahitian had won the French national surfing championships. Similarly, interest in modern surfing among the indigenous Māori people of Aotearoa exploded with the introduction in the early 1970s of foam and fiberglass boards, which could be cheaply and easily made locally. Māori youth living along the west and east coasts of the North Island took to the waves in great numbers, and since then many have achieved recognition in national and international competition.

As for the early spread from Hawai'i toward other shores, it dates back a bit farther than we were aware of when we first researched this book. Though George Freeth, who visited Redondo Beach in 1907, still stands as the sport's first popular ambassador, recent research has uncovered the fact that Hawaiians surfed the shores of Monterey Bay as long ago as 1885.

A trio of Hawaiian princes, nephews of King Kalākaua, were enrolled at a military school south of San Francisco. They sometimes spent weekends with a family friend in Santa Cruz, Mrs. Lyman Swan, whose mother was Hawaiian. On July 20, 1885, the following item appeared in a local paper, *The Santa Cruz Daily Surf*, in a column called "Beach Breezes":

> The young Hawaiian princes were in the water enjoying it immensely and giving interesting exhibitions of surfboard swimming as practiced in their native land.

This is the first recorded instance of board-surfing on the West Coast, though not the first word of wave-riding there. That is to be found in Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (Boston, 1840). Dana was a New Englander who had left Harvard for medical reasons and went to sea on a trading ship bound for California, by way of Cape Horn, in search of cattle hides. The ship's first West Coast stop was Santa Barbara. It was January 1835. Young Dana was in the first long-boat trying to make the beach, and a heavy winter swell was running. The Americans were worried about capsizing in the shorebreak, when they were shown how to maneuver by a crew from another merchant ship that had recently dropped anchor. These were Hawaiian sailors accustomed to moving canoes through rushing surf:

> The sun had just gone down; it was getting dusky; the damp night wind was beginning to blow, and the heavy swell of the Pacific was setting in, and breaking loud and high "combers" on the beach. We lay on our oars in the swell, just outside the surf, waiting for a good chance to run it, when a boat which had put off from the Ayacucho just after us came alongside of us, with a crew of dusky Sandwich Islanders talking and hallooing in their outlandish tongue.

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The watermen who rode to shore that evening in 1835 had learned their wave-sliding skills in an archipelago that lay some 2,500 miles farther west. Where they came from, intimacy with every nuance of the all-surrounding sea was part of daily life; it was part of a cultural legacy already many centuries old, and tied to a mid-Pacific world so remote that, in those days, very few people outside Hawai'i had any idea where it was. Geographically, it is still the most isolated place on Earth, the farthest removed from another land mass. In order to find Hawai'i, ancestor-navigators long ago mastered trans-Pacific voyaging. How Hawaiians mastered the surf that fringes their home islands is still a story unique in the history of ocean-going peoples.

—B. F. and J.D.H.

Honolulu and Santa Cruz, 1996

Pronouncing Hawaiian

Until recently Hawaiian was written with seven consonants—h, l, m, n, p, k, and w—five vowels—a, e, i, o, u—and no diacritical marks. Now it is becoming common to employ two diacritical marks: the *ʻōkina* (ʻ) or glottal stop and the *kahakō* or macron (¯). The ʻokina actually represents a consonant. Its pronunciation is similar to the sound between the "ohs" in the English phrase "oh-oh." The ʻokina usually shows up between two vowels (as in *Hawaiʻi*), but it is the first character of some words, including ʻokina. The kahakō placed over vowels indicates stress or increased duration. These marks are necessary to correctly understand and pronounce written Hawaiian. Consider, for example, how the placement of the kahakō changes meaning: *pāʻu* refers to the long skirt worn by women horseback riders, while *paʻū* means soaked or drenched. Remove the kahakō and you've got *paʻu*, or soot. Then take out the ʻokina as well, and you're left with the familiar local monosyllable for finished: *pau*. For accuracy and to honor the unique language and culture of Hawaiʻi, we have tried to use the ʻokina and kahakō correctly throughout this book, following the usage in the *Hawaiian Dictionary*, by Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert (University of Hawaiʻi Press, 1986), and in other authoritative works.

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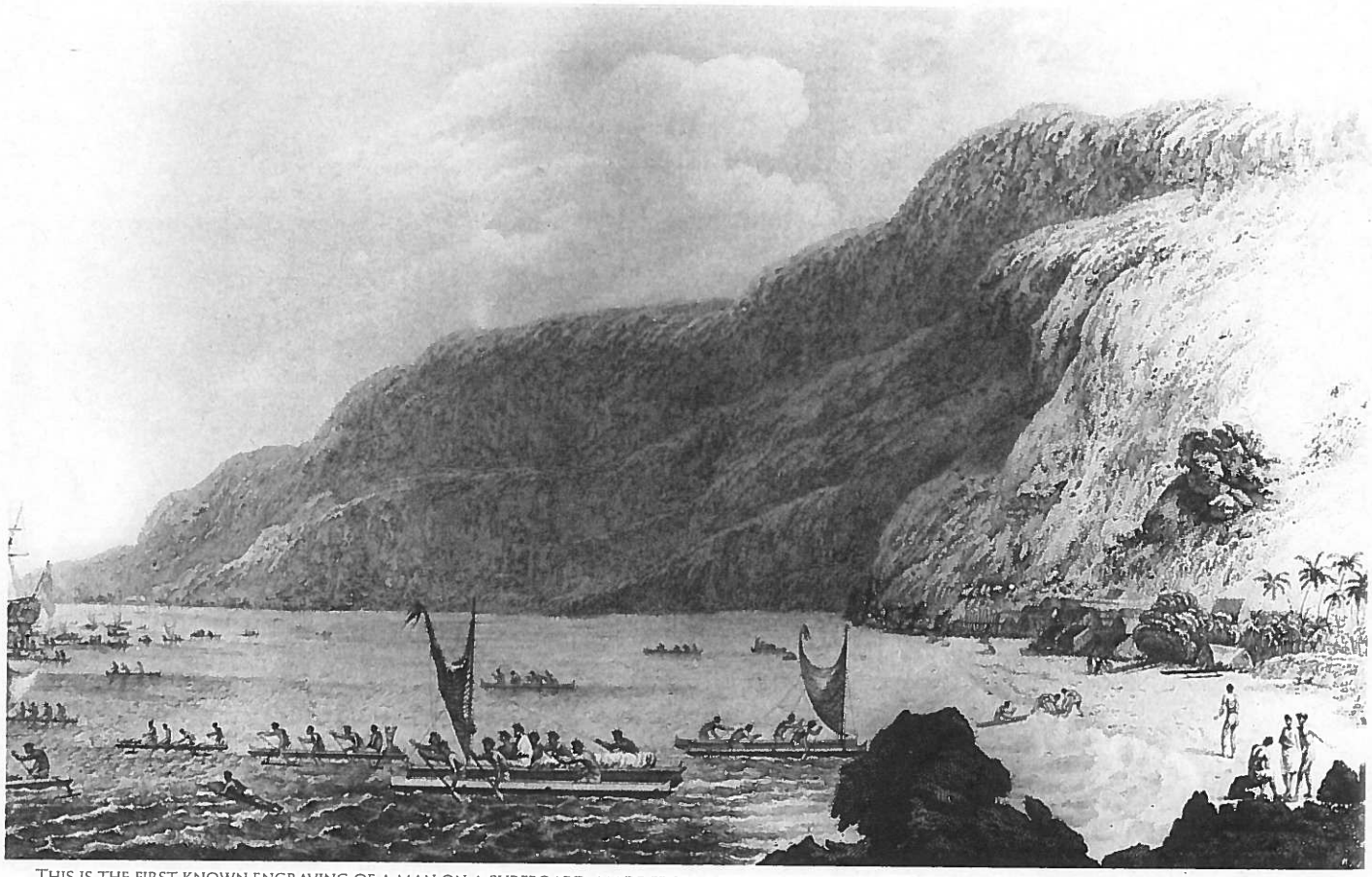
White-capped waves, billowy waves,
Waves that break into a heap,
    waves that break and spread.
The surf rises above them all,
The rough surf of the island,
The Great surf that pounds and thrashes,
The foamy surf of Hikiau.
It is the sea on which to surf at noon,
The sea that washes the pebbles and
    corals ashore.

—from *The Surf Chant of Naihe,*
Chief of Kaʻū (translated by Mary Kawena Pukui)



THIS IS THE FIRST KNOWN ENGRAVING OF A MAN ON A SURFBOARD, MADE FROM A SKETCH DRAWN IN 1778 DURING CAPTAIN COOK'S THIRD VOYAGE TO THE PACIFIC. THE FIGURE PADDLING AT LOWER LEFT IS HEADING OUT WITH OTHER HAWAIIANS TO MEET COOK'S SHIPS AT KEALAKEKUA BAY.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Wave, the Board, and the Surfer

Here waves climb into dusk on gleaming mail;
Invisible valves of the sea, —locks, tendons
Crested and creeping, troughing corridors
That fall back yawning to another plunge.

—HART CRANE

Hawai'i's gift to the world of sport is surfing—sliding down the slope of a breaking wave on a surfboard. Long before Captain Cook sailed into Kealakekua Bay, Hawaiians had mastered the art of standing erect while speeding toward shore. Riding prone on a wave with the aid of a short bodyboard was practiced throughout the Pacific Islands, primarily by youngsters, and probably dates back thousands of years. The Hawaiians took this ancestral habit, lengthened the boards, refined their shapes, and developed techniques that moved Lt. James King, in the first published account of surfing, to exclaim, "The boldness and address with which I saw them perform these difficult and dangerous manoeuvers was altogether astonishing and is scarcely to be believed."[1]

Today this exhilarating sport is still Hawai'i's "national pastime." Hundreds of surfers daily accept the challenge of the islands' famous shorelines. Moreover, from Hawai'i the sport has spread to five continents and many more islands scattered among the world's oceans. Yet Hawai'i continues to be surfing's mecca, attracting surfers from around the world who come to test their skills on the giant winter swells generated by North Pacific storms or to enjoy the gentler waves that radiate up from the South Pacific each summer.

This book tells the history of surfing from its ancient Polynesian beginnings to its status as an international sport. It is a story full of myth and daring, courtship and craftsmanship, religion and ingenuity. Its details come from such sources as Hawaiian chants, explorers' journals, and manuscripts penned by newly literate Hawaiians, as well as from the testimony of the men and women who keep the sport alive today. The early sources tell how the sport was bound up with the traditional religion, sexual practices, and the system of social classes. Surfing feats and romantic encounters in the surf were celebrated in song and legend. Board builders followed sacred rituals, and at least one temple was solely dedicated to surfing. The privileged chiefs as well as people from all levels of society took part, and they achieved a proficiency in the water that has only recently been matched.

Later sources tell of the near death of the sport, its revival, and its current spread and development. Soon after the arrival of alien explorers, traders, and missionaries—and all the ills and opportunities they brought—surfing began to decline. For nearly a hundred years it was dying a slow death like so many other activities that had been woven into the religious and cultural fabric of Hawaiian civilization.

But surfing did not die out completely; at the beginning of this century it began to recover. The story of its renaissance is unique, since surfing today is one of the few features of traditional Hawaiian culture to reach out and establish itself in other parts of the world.

Before recounting this history, however, we need to know something about the sport itself. What is surfing? Where does it occur? What is the natural force that can send a surfer and a board streaking along the ocean's edge?

THE WAVE

The first requirement is a ridable wave. Surfing doesn't begin when surfers dip their arms into the water to paddle out to an approaching swell. It begins much earlier, far out at sea, typically hundreds or often thousands of miles from where the wave finally peaks and cracks to roll shoreward.

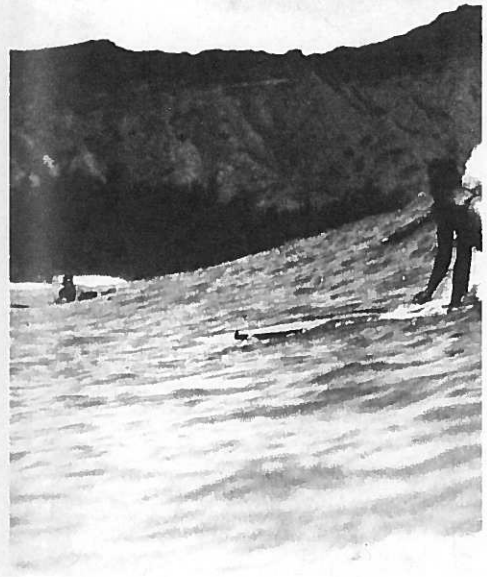
The primary wave-building force is wind, as it strikes the ocean's surface. Without wind we would have no waves. Waves formed by wind and ocean storms grow into irregular patterns called *seas*. Long periods of wind over wide ocean stretches produce heavy seas, and waves leaving these storm areas are called *swells*. They fan out much like ripples around a pebble dropped in a pond. They decrease in height, increase in length, and eventually become a series of long, low, and regular undulations called *ground swells*. Although these swells move through the ocean, very little water is displaced. Just as wind agitating a grainfield makes waves while the grain itself stays rooted in the earth, so the wave-*form* rolls through water, whereas the water molecules themselves move a little, but barely advance.

Swells usually travel in *sets* of from three to as many as twelve or so. The distance between the crests of two successive swells is called the wave *length*. As these swells enter shallow coastal waters of islands or continents, ridable waves begin to form. When the water depth is one-half the wave length, the incoming swell begins to feel drag from the bottom. The distance between crests decreases. The swell slows down, and internal flow patterns cause the water to pile up as the wave back overtakes the wave front. Tons of water bulge from the ocean's surface.

A wave usually breaks when water depth equals one and one-third the wave's height. A six-foot wave, for example, will break in eight feet of water. A small wave will break closer to shore than a large one. Depending upon its size, then, and the shape of the bottom, an incoming swell will grow steeper and steeper until the crest rises sharply, peaks, and finally breaks in the roaring conclusion called *surf*.

A wave breaks in one of two main ways: either it *plunges* or it *spills*. The spiller, generally easier to ride, is caused by a relatively flat bottom. As a swell approaches the shallow water, its crest sharpens, crumbles into foam, and spills down the wave face. If well suited for surfing, it will not spill over all at once; rather, one section—the section moving through the shallowest water—will break first, and the spilling white water will spread from there across the wave as it rolls to shore, until the entire wave is white water. Such a wave is ideal because the surfer's objective is to slide diagonally across a wave's face, keeping ahead of the breaking foam. Thus, spillers usually provide longer rides.

Plungers are noisier and more spectacular. They are usually caused by a steeply sloping bottom. The swell rises quickly, until part of its face is vertical. Then the crest leaps out and pours into the wave's trough, forming for an instant a water tunnel. Turbulence makes a plunger more hazardous than a spiller, but when mastered it offers more excitement for the experienced surfer be-



SURFERS TAKING OFF ON A WAVE AT WAIK

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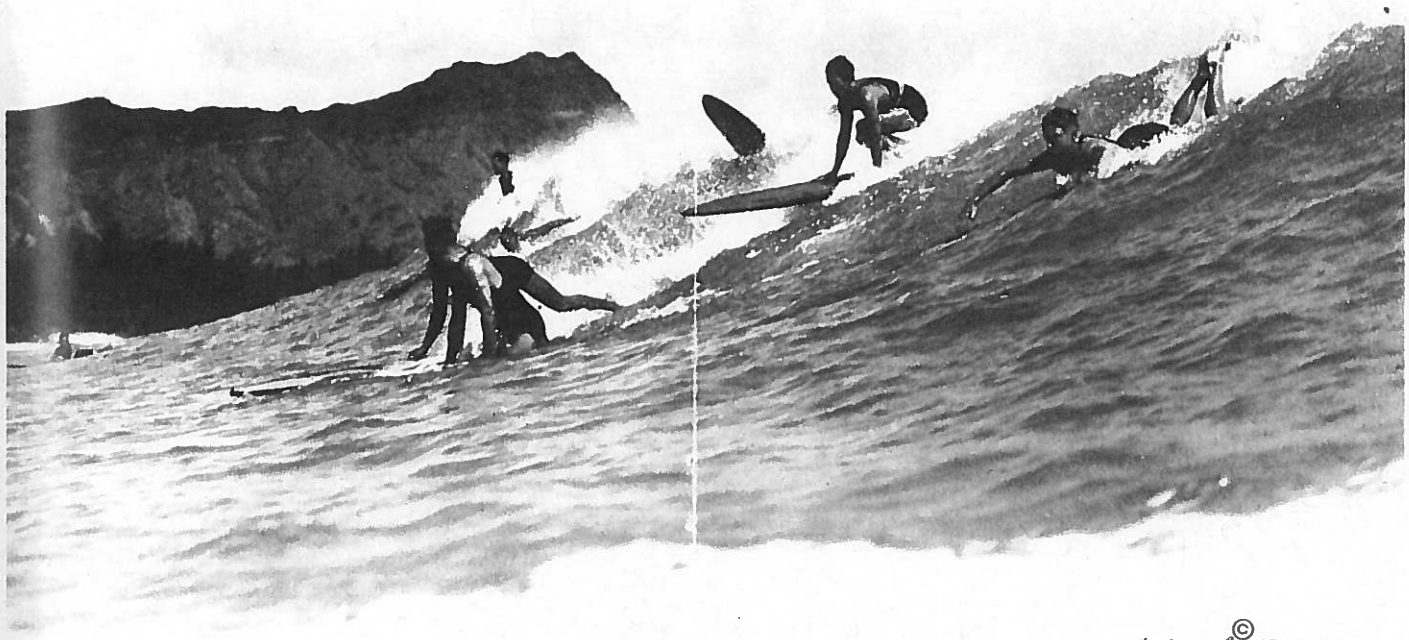

SURFERS TAKING OFF ON A WAVE AT WAIKĪKĪ, 1925. PHOTO FROM THE *HONOLULU ADVERTISER*, COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

cause of increased speed, steepness, and greater risks.

Whether a wave spills or plunges depends upon the shape of the ocean bottom. The wide variation in offshore topography provides unlimited possibilities in these two basic breaker types. Sand, coral reef, or a submerged rock formation will each produce its distinctive wave. A sandy beach, for example, may produce spillers in the winter and plungers in the summer, as storms and tidal power shift sand around to make the bottom flat or steeply sloped. The shape of a rocky headland, on the other hand, will rarely change, and any variation in the surf that breaks there will depend on the size and direction of the swell itself.

From wherever they come and however they break, most surfing waves, after traveling so far over the ocean, will have from fifteen to forty-five seconds to thunder and sizzle before they bury themselves in the ocean again and disappear in a million rolling bubbles. But while a surfable wave lasts, it offers its blue, inviting slope, and just behind the spot where it breaks, the surfer waits to catch a ride.

THE BOARD

Once the wave peaks there are three basic ways to ride it: in a canoe, by body-surfing, or on a board. For canoe-surfing, Hawaiians use an outrigger canoe, which because of its bulk needs a gently sloping wave. The entire crew paddles to catch an approaching swell. Once riding, the canoe moves slower than a board; the big craft skims ahead of the break but cannot angle as sharply. Its position is controlled by a paddle used over the stern as rudder. Body-surfers swim to catch a wave. Once part of it, they angle their bodies and head away from the break, bringing their arms to their sides and hunching their shoulders so that their upper bodies become the planing surface. The full-sized surfboard, however, with its capability for greater speed, larger waves, and a variety of maneuvers, has always been the most popular and dramatic means of riding.

Since early surfing times the board has developed almost as remarkably as the sport itself. Lieutenant King described the Hawaiians riding on "a long narrow board, rounded at the ends." The old cigar-shaped boards were carved from solid woods natural to Hawai'i and could weigh 150 pounds or more. At present [1966] a typical surfboard is made of molded plastic foam or balsa wood. It may weigh twenty-five pounds, but the weight varies according to the weight of the surfer and the type of wave the board will ride. It might be ten feet long, about two feet wide, and three inches deep, pointed at the nose with rounded edges, and tapering to a foot-wide flat tail. The whole board is covered with several layers of waterproofing, reinforcing fiberglass. The deck is flat, and the surfer usually waxes it with paraffin for surefootedness. The bottom is slightly rounded to allow smoother gliding, and a skeg, or tail-fin, serves as a kind of rudder to hold the board in the wave and facilitate turning. (The development of surfboard construction and performance is covered in greater detail in Chapter Five.)

THE SURFER

With a wave to ride and board to stand on, a surfer today enjoys the swells in much the same way as did the Hawaiians of old. The most arduous part, of course, is paddling through rushing surf to the take-off point. What follows here are the basics of surfing, in case you have not yet tested the waters yourself.

The ideal place to catch a wave is where its face is steepest and just about to break, so paddle out to a position just beyond the point where this will occur, and wait for a set to build. When a good wave

SURFERS ENJOYING A SMALL WA

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Riding "straight off" in front of the bounding white water is the

SURFERS ENJOYING A SMALL WAVE AT WAIKĪKĪ, C. 1910. PHOTO COURTESY HAWAI'I STATE ARCHIVES, HONOLULU.

more amateurish and sometimes more dangerous style, especially in big surf where the foam itself may form a tumbling wall six feet high. It is much more exhilarating to angle your board to the right and left and cross the wave's as-yet-unbroken face with the white water leaping and roaring behind you. The resultant speed is a combination of the wave's forward motion and your board's "across" motion. You are then skimming down a bottomless incline that continues building below you as it carries you shoreward.

Once you are standing and sliding diagonally across a wave, success depends upon your grace and balance and your ability to judge when and where the wave will break. If you slide too far out on the shoulder, your speed drops off, and if you stay too near the toppling crest it can overwhelm you. Standing too far forward on your board will make the nose dig in or "pearl dive," dumping you in the ocean. Neither can you stand too far back toward the tail, or your board rears up, loses its grip, and stalls. Stalling, however, can work to your advantage when you want to slow down until the break catches up with you, or to turn back into the faster part of the wave.

You control your ledgelike position on the wave with foot movements and shifts in body weight. By simultaneously leaning back on your rear foot and toward the direction you want to turn, you can bank your board to the right or left. Near shore you can turn your board into the break and ride the "soup" to the beach, or whip your board up and over the wave top and then paddle back to the take-off point. If a wave breaks right on you, you can try to ride it out, either standing or prone—or jump off the board, grab the nose, and push it under the wave to get clear of it on the seaward side. If you fall off or are knocked off, your board heads toward the beach with the wave while you have to swim for it.

After an inevitable period of awkwardness while learning, the aspiring surfer acquires the necessary skills, finds just the right board, and knows how to recognize some good waves. These three elements produce the experience called surfing.

Only one other factor remains to be explained: the actual physics of the sport. What is it that propels the board across this moving slope? From a surfer's viewpoint several forces are involved: the buoyancy of the board itself; the surfer's initial speed-building paddle, which overcomes friction between the board and the water; the take-off and drop, when gravity pulls the board downward as the ride begins; and the push a moving wave imparts to the board. A precise description of the relationship between these forces is the job of the marine physicist. Let us be content with an amateur's theory on "the physics of surfing" offered by Jack London in 1907 after he tried to master the sport during a visit to Hawai'i on his yacht, *The Snark*:

> Lie out there quietly on your board. Sea after sea breaks before, behind and under and over you, and rushes in on shore, leaving you behind. When a wave crests, it gets steeper. Imagine yourself, on your board, on the face of that steep slope. If it stood still, you would slide down just as a boy slides down a hill on a coaster. "But," you object, "the wave doesn't stand still." Very true, but the water composing the wave stands still, and there you have the secret. If you ever start sliding down the face of that wave, you'll keep on sliding and you'll never reach the bottom. Please don't laugh. The face may be six feet, yet you can slide down it a quarter of a mile, or half a mile, and not reach the bottom. For, see, since a wave is only communicated agitation or impetus, and since the water that composes the wave is changing every instant, new water is rising into the wave as fast as the wave travels. You slide down this new water and yet remain in your old position on the wave skidding down the still newer water tl forming the wave . . . between you and the s quarter mile of water. As the wave travels, t ingly heaps itself into the wave, gravity do down you go sliding the whole length of it. .
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> And now for another phase of the physic All rules have their exceptions. It is true that wave does not travel forward. But there is wh the send of the sea. The water in the overtop move forward, as you will speedily realize if in the face by it, or if you are caught under it a by one mighty blow down under the surface p ing for a half a minute. The water in the top c upon the water in the bottom of the wave. Bu tom of the wave strikes land, it stops, while . . . Where was solid water beneath it, is now first time it feels the grip of gravity, and dow same time being torn asunder from the laggir wave and flung forward. And it is because of surfboard is something more than mere placi hill. In truth, one is caught up and hurled s some Titan's hand.[2]

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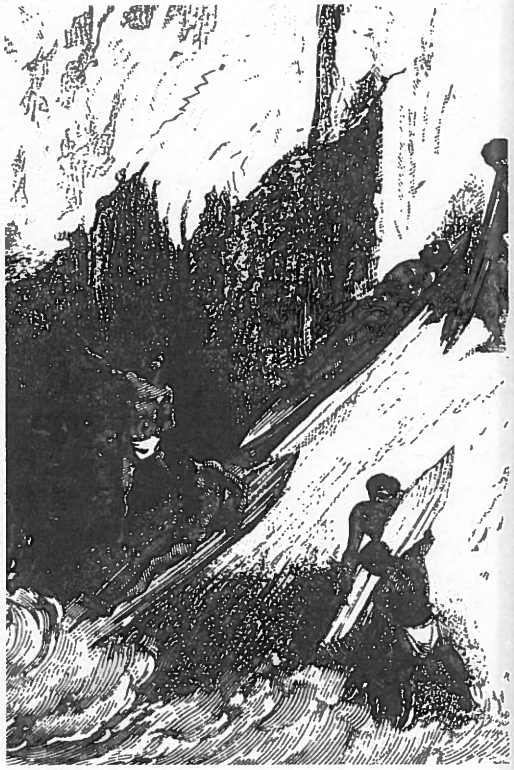
And now for another phase of the physics of surf-riding. All rules have their exceptions. It is true that the water in the wave does not travel forward. But there is what may be called the send of the sea. The water in the overtoppling crest does move forward, as you will speedily realize if you are slapped in the face by it, or if you are caught under it and are pounded by one mighty blow down under the surface panting and gasping for a half a minute. The water in the top of the wave rests upon the water in the bottom of the wave. But when the bottom of the wave strikes land, it stops, while the top goes on. . . . Where was solid water beneath it, is now air, and for the first time it feels the grip of gravity, and down it falls, at the same time being torn asunder from the lagging bottom of the wave and flung forward. And it is because of this that riding a surfboard is something more than mere placid sliding down a hill. In truth, one is caught up and hurled shoreward as by some Titan's hand.[2]

Good surfing waves are not unusual; they occur frequently in many parts of the world. The sport depends on more than waves, however. Before the advent of protective wet suits, no one surfed the more northerly beaches bathed in frigid water. Relatively warm water and a climate favorable for outdoor sports are necessary, as are people without fear of the sea. All these conditions exist in varying degrees on most of the islands of the open Pacific and in several other areas around the globe. Indeed, surfing's global spread has depended on this. Yet in all of the Pacific—and throughout the world, for that matter—the islands of Hawai'i are probably the best adapted for riding ocean waves.

The whole archipelago, well within the tropic zone, is blessed with a general coastal water temperature of 70 degrees or more. Although coral reefs edge most of the islands, they do not absorb the ocean swell before it hits shore. In the best surfing areas these reefs combine with sandy or rocky bottoms to shape swells ideal for surfing, at distances from twenty-five yards to a quarter mile from shore. Hawai'i is fortunately located, moreover, because it is in the path of the Pacific's dominant swells. O'ahu, the island best suited to surfing, receives ground swells from both the North and South Pacific. It catches the "north swell" from October through January as it rolls away from winter storms near Siberia and Alaska. During the summer, from May to October, O'ahu's southern shore takes the "south swell" from storm centers as far away as the high latitudes of the South Pacific.

Surfing in Hawai'i is a year-round sport in water and weather that is perpetually warm. Because of the variety of swells the islands receive and the variety of shoreline and bottom combinations—long sand beaches, coral reefs, jutting lava headlands, lagoons, and curving bays—there is surf to suit every level of riding skill. For beginners, there are the usually gentle rollers at Waikīkī; for the "pros," the terrifying, twenty-five foot giants of Mākaha and Sunset Beach—waves that can snap a board like a twig or catch a tiny rip in its fiberglass cover and flay it clean. It isn't surprising then when we find that Hawai'i is still surfing's capital and that in ancient times the sport developed there to a degree far in advance of any other island group in the Pacific.



BAYARD.

CHAPTER TWO

Pacific Origins

The tide of emigration, let it roll as it will, never overwhelms the backwoodsman unto itself; he rides upon the advance, as the Polynesian upon the comb of the surf.

—HERMAN MELVILLE

The Pacific Ocean isn't always true to its name. It generates raging storms and produces some of the largest sea swells in the world. For ages its waves have pounded the shores of continents and islands, heaping an obstacle between humanity and the open sea, warning us of what crushing power the ocean holds. In several parts of the Pacific, however, the island people turned the restless edges of this ocean to their own advantage. In search of recreation, they learned to ride the waves. Surrounded by the sounds and spectacle of the sea, they were the first to tame its less-violent offerings.

No one knows who first realized the possibilities of riding the swells that had always been so much a part of island life. It may have been a weary swimmer, bounced all the way to the beach in a white boil, or a fisherman in a canoe, straining to make shore in heavy seas, or simply a youngster playing in the waves who first knew the thrill of racing across the rising slopes. Simple board-surfing—in which a swimmer uses a short plank or other aid to ride a wave just for the fun of it—was practiced throughout the Pacific Islands. Recreational wave-riding was probably part of the general marine adaptation pioneered by the first people to enter the open Pacific. That would date the beginnings of the sport back to almost 2000 B.C., when the ancestors of the Polynesians and other Pacific islanders started moving eastward from Southeast Asia to explore and colonize this vast oceanic region. Recent archaeological finds suggest that the first canoes reached Hawai'i by at least A.D. 400. Those first settlers were probably already skilled in simple surfing, and perhaps after several hundred years of riding Hawai'i's big waves they began to develop the big boards, the art of standing up while riding diagonally across a wave front, and other features of this uniquely Hawaiian form of the sport. A cautious guess would then date Hawaiian surfing back at least a thousand years.

If the earliest dates are vague, there is no doubt that by the eighteenth century Hawaiians had been surfing long enough to develop skills that amazed European explorers and other early visitors. Among those who left us the first written descriptions of what they called "wave-riding," "surf-riding," or "surf-boarding" was Lieutenant King, whose surprise upon witnessing how the Hawaiians rode the waves we have already noted in Chapter One. He went on to say, "Their first object is to place themselves on the summit of the largest surge, by which they are driven with amazing rapidity towards shore."

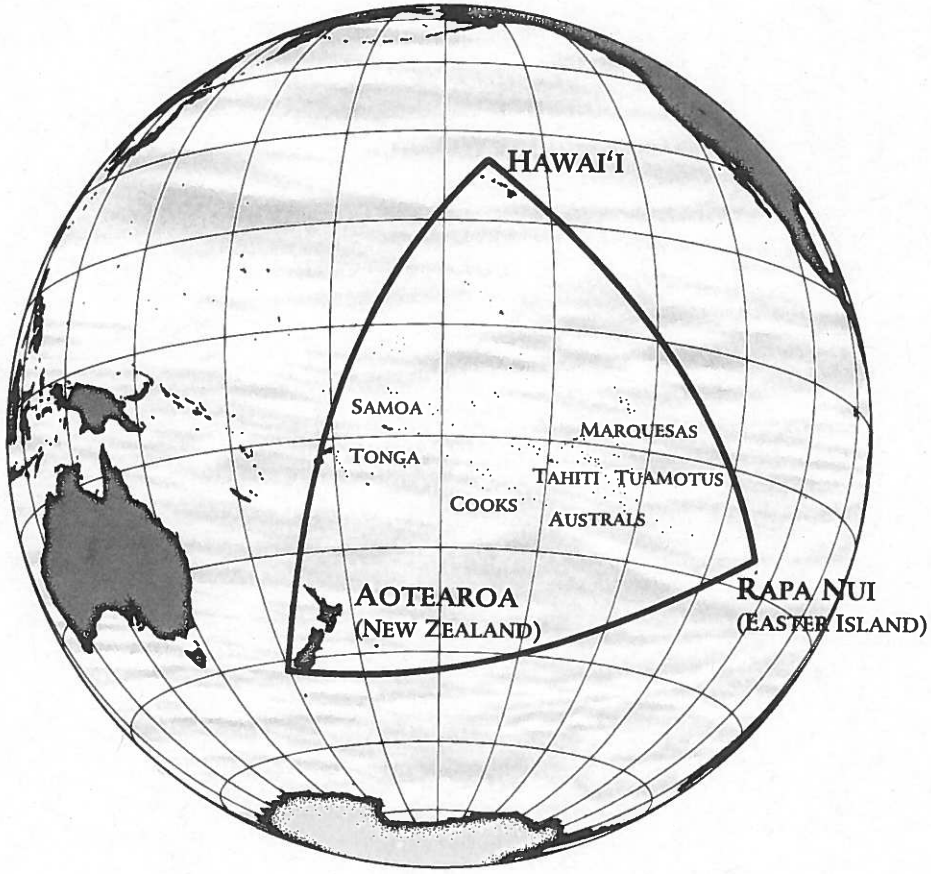


FIGURE 1.

INDIGENOUS BOARD-SURFING IN THE PACIFIC WAS MOST HIGHLY DEVELOPED ON ISLANDS WITHIN THE POLYNESIAN TRIANGLE BOUNDED BY HAWAI'I, RAPA NUI (EASTER ISLAND), AND AOTEAROA (NEW ZEALAND). EARLY REPORTS OF SURFING ALONG THE SHORES OF ISLANDS FROM NEW GUINEA TO POLYNESIA INDICATE THAT THIS SPORT, AT LEAST IN ITS RUDIMENTARY FORM, WAS PART OF THE COMMON HERITAGE OF THE SEAFARING PEOPLE WHO SPREAD ACROSS THE PACIFIC THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO.

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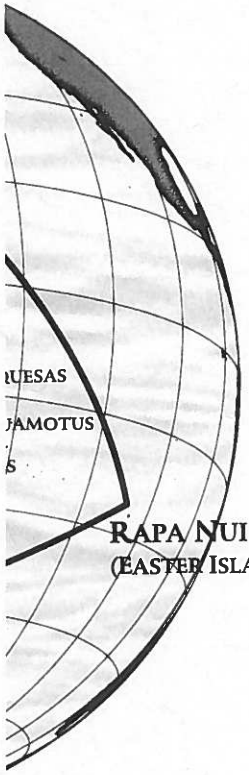

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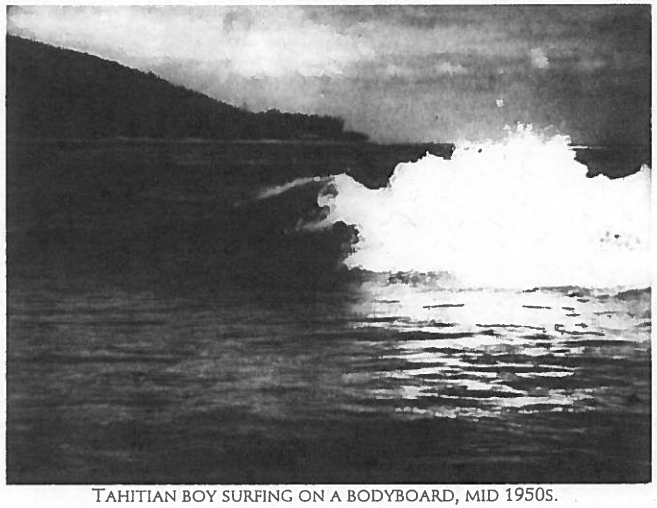
Hawaiians, of course, were not alone in their enjoyment of the Pacific's waves. A few years later and two thousand plus miles south, James Morrison, boatswain's mate on the HMS *Bounty*, observed how Tahitians reveled in riding the surf. Other early accounts establish that surfing was enjoyed throughout Polynesia, that great triangle of islands bounded by Hawai'i in the north, lonely Rapa Nui (the indigenous name for Easter Island) in the southeast, and the massive islands of Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the southwest. But the sport, at least in its most rudimentary form, was not purely Polynesian. As indicated in figure 1, some form of surfing with a board—or with the stem of a coconut frond, a bundle of reeds, or just about anything that would provide a little buoyancy and a planing surface—was practiced throughout the Pacific islands. Yet there was a great difference between Hawaiian surfing and surfing elsewhere in the Pacific that becomes apparent when we consider who surfed, the size of the boards, and how the boards were ridden.

The first point, the surfers themselves, is important because it suggests the sport's social position. Who were the people who took part in a sport that embraced hundreds of Pacific Islands? Were they adults or children, men or women, chiefs or commoners? On the islands of the western Pacific and along the western edge of Polynesia, surfing was mainly a children's pastime, dominated by boys, if we can trust the accounts. By contrast, on most main islands of East Polynesia* surfing was a sport for both sexes and all ages. For example, in Tahiti, the *Bounty*'s Morrison wrote, "at this diversion all sexes were excellent . . . the children also take their sport in the smaller surfs."[1] The same seems to have been the case for the Māori people of Aotearoa and for the surfers of Marquesas and Rapa, located to the



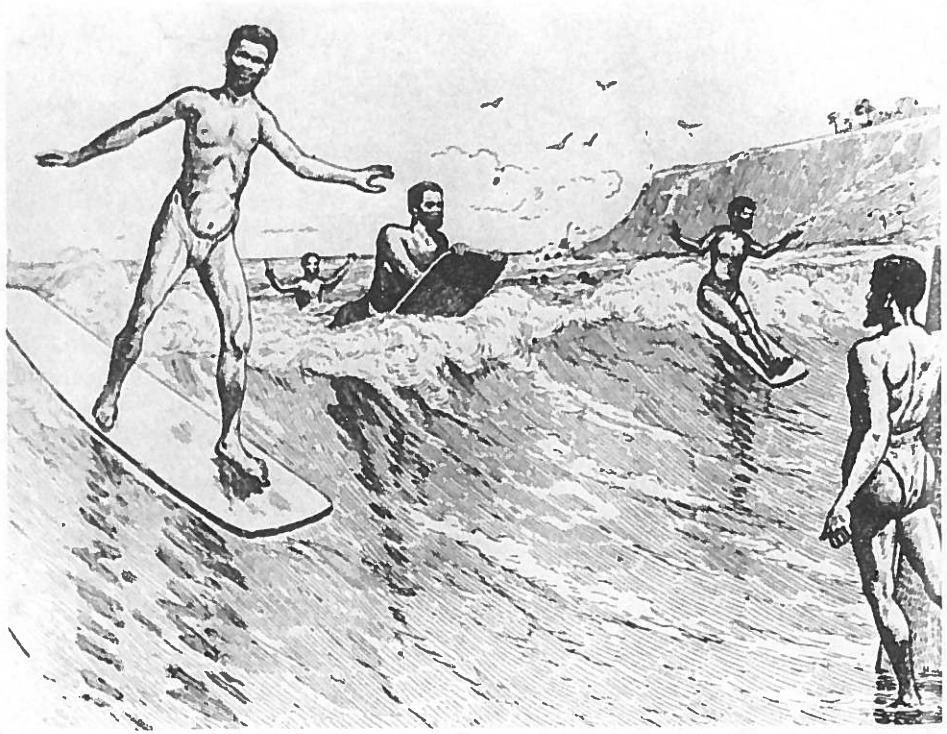
TAHITIAN BOY SURFING ON A BODYBOARD, MID 1950S.
PHOTO COURTESY BUD BROWNE.

northeast and south of Tahiti, respectively. Above all, in Hawai'i everyone enjoyed the sport, men and women, young and old. And as we shall see in the next chapter, the chiefs of Hawai'i were especially adept at surfing.

The other points of comparison—board size and riding position—are closely related, since a board's shape and length determine how one rides it. Two basic board types are used in the surf. A bodyboard (also known as a belly board or a *paipo* board) is usually from two to four feet long and is used as an auxiliary aid in sliding across a wave. Surfers using bodyboards actually swim, holding the boards in front of themselves as planing surfaces. This is commonly a children's pas-

*Primarily Hawai'i, the Marquesas Islands, Tahiti and the surrounding Society Islands, the Cook Islands, plus Aotearoa. Although Aotearoa forms the southwestern corner of Polynesia, it is classified culturally as East Polynesian because it was probably settled from the Cooks and the Societies.

time. True surfing requires a full-sized board, usually six feet or longer and at least around eighteen inches wide, that can support the rider entirely, allowing him or her to ride prone, kneeling or standing. Early accounts specifically mention long boards in only two island groups: Hawai'i and Aotearoa. Aotearoa boards are described as reaching six feet in length, but because they were only some nine inches wide they probably did not allow a rider to stand up. Morrison says boards of "any length" were used in Tahiti and that the more expert Tahitians could stand up while surfing, which implies that some of the Tahitian boards were approaching surfboard size. The next largest boards in Polynesia—four-foot planks in the Marquesas and long reed bundles from Rapa Nui (where because of deforestation there was little wood available)—apparently did not allow the riders to stand up. Elsewhere in Polynesia and the rest of the Pacific island region the boards were short bodyboards, and there is no mention of riders sitting, kneeling, or standing erect.



THIS LATE 1800S PRINT SHOWS HAWAIIAN SURFERS STANDING, PRONE, AND SITTING ON WAVES. PHOTO COURTESY HAWAI'I MARITIME CENTER, HONOLULU.

The Hawaiians, however, possessed true surfboards. The largest of these were eighteen or more feet long, two feet wide, and five or six inches thick, and could weigh 150 pounds or more. Such boards are still preserved in Honolulu's museums. They were buoyant enough to support the rider and allow all the riding positions: prone, sitting, kneeling, and standing. It is well known that Hawaiians were capable of all these maneuvers in the surf around their islands. This variety of skills, on long boards, together with the widespread participation of all classes was unequaled in any other Pacific island group.

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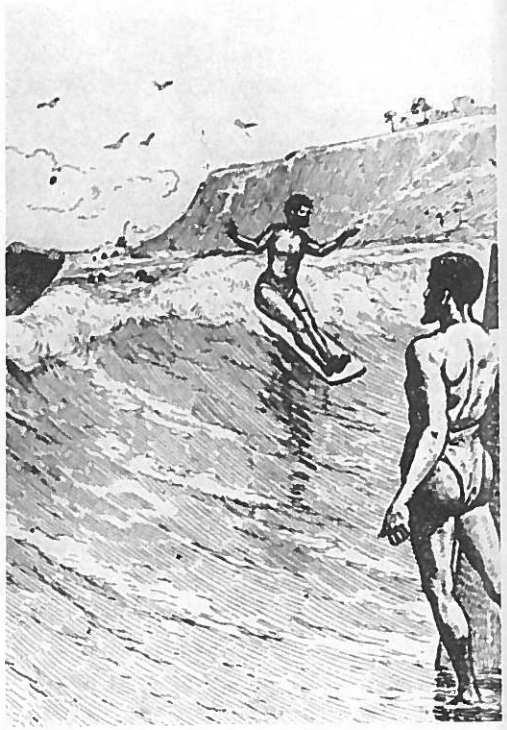

JRFERS STANDING, PRONE, AND SITTING ON WAVES.
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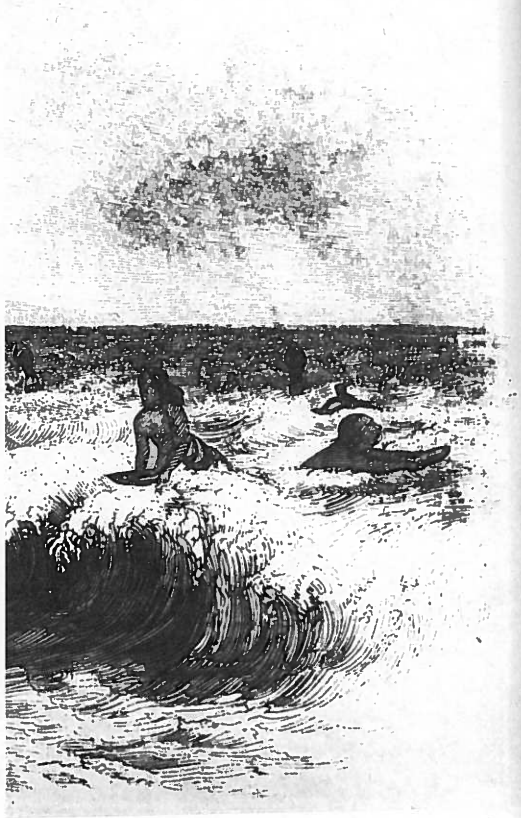
Tahitian surfers came the closest. Although board lengths are not definitely established, we know that Tahitians sometimes rode in a kneeling position. And according to Morrison, some eighteenth-century experts could stand on their boards, at least momentarily. That both men and women and particularly the chiefs of Tahiti enjoyed the sport suggests its high development there. It is doubtful, however, that Tahiti's chiefs could have won a surfing contest at Waikīkī. One of the few men who observed the sport in both groups during the nineteenth century, William Ellis, made this observation of the Tahitian surfers:

> Their surf-boards are inferior to those of the Sandwich Islanders [Hawaiians], and I do not think swimming in the sea as an amusement, whatever it might have been formerly, is now practiced so much by the natives of the South, as by those of the North.[2]

It is tempting to consider that the Hawaiian and Tahitian developments were not just parallel but were actually connected. Many legends describe canoe voyages between Tahiti and Hawai'i made some seven or eight centuries ago, reckoned by counting back the generations in the chiefly genealogies in which the heroic voyagers appear. One legend tells of a chief who sailed from Tahiti to Hawai'i and then abandoned his voyaging life to "live and die" near a famous surfing break on Kaua'i. These tales, plus the apparent incorporation of Tahitian features in the language of the Hawaiians and their material culture and social structure, suggest that the two cultures may have been in contact around A.D. 1200. The high degree of surfing development in both places may therefore be an example of cultural sharing dating from this period, although we can only speculate over whether Tahitian or Hawaiian surfers took the first steps in developing the sport beyond a children's pastime.

Was board-surfing limited to the Pacific islands? In all the world, we have found only two other places where surfing may have developed independently from the Pacific island sport: West Africa and northern Peru. From Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Ghana come reports of bodyboard surfing, which, particularly since they date back to the 1830s, may indicate that African youths along this coast independently hit upon the idea of using planks to ride the waves. From northern Peru there are descriptions of fishermen who fish offshore sitting on reed bundles, which they call *caballitos* (little horses). When done fishing, they paddle back to shore (using a wooden paddle) and catch a wave or two coming in through the surf, a practice that may be of great antiquity since fishermen sitting astride and paddling their caballitos are featured in pre-Columbian pottery. However, in neither of these cases did surfing develop into anything like Hawaiian surfing. And these rudimentary forms do not seem to have spread elsewhere. Even though modern surfing now flourishes along the beaches of Peru and South Africa, it spread there from Hawai'i—as will be explained in our last chapter.

Although exact relationships between islands may be obscure, the following sequence in the origin of Hawaiian surfing seems likely. First, those early canoe voyagers—who initiated the exploration and colonization of the Pacific some four thousand years ago—developed rudimentary board-surfing: primarily a children's pastime practiced with short bodyboards. As their descendants pushed farther into the Pacific, they carried this pastime with them. Then, on some of the main islands of East Polynesia it came to be taken up more and more by adult men and women using larger boards. Finally, along the shores of the Hawaiian Islands, surfing reached its peak. There the feat of standing erect on a speeding board found its finest expression.



'O BE A NATIONAL PASTIME.

CHAPTER THREE

Ali'i, Olo, and Alaia

Arise! Arise, ye great surfs from Kahiki,
The powerful curling waves.
Arise with pōhuehue.
Well up, long raging surf.

With the Hawaiians' mastery of the sport itself, the story has barely begun. As a part of the fabled Hawaiian way of life of pre-European times, surfing was more than just catching and riding an ocean wave. It was the center of a circle of social and ritual activities that began with the very selection of the tree from which a board was carved and could end in the premature death of a chief—as was the result of at least one famous surfing contest in Hawaiian legend.

Early writers, observing its popularity and the obvious relish and sometimes passionate dedication with which Hawaiians approached the sport, referred to it as "a national pastime," "a most prominent and popular pastime," or "a favorite amusement." When the British ship *Blonde* stopped in Hawai'i in the early 1820s her commander, Lord Byron, cousin to the poet, noted, "to have a neat floatboard, well-kept, and dried, is to a Sandwich Islander what a tilbury or cabriolet, or whatever light carriage may be in fashion is to a young English man."[1]

In 1823 the missionary C. S. Stewart observed that on Maui the surfboard formed "an article of personal property among all the chiefs, male and female, and among many of the common people."[2] After a run of particularly heavy waves off the Lāhainā coast he added that such surf provided "a fine opportunity to the islanders for the enjoyment of their favorite sport of the surfboard. It is a daily amusement at all times, but the more terrific the surf, the more delightful the pastime to those skillful in the management of the boards. . . . hundreds at a time have been occupied in this way for hours together." And Ellis, that adventurous missionary who hiked around the island of Hawai'i, described the islanders' mass reaction to a sudden run of good waves: "the thatch houses of a whole village stood empty," he said; "daily tasks such as farming, fishing and tapa-making were left undone while an entire community—men, women and children—enjoyed themselves in the rising surf and rushing white water."

Such village-wide participation was never difficult to organize. Because of climate, their means of livelihood, and a general dependence on the ocean, most Hawaiians lived near the warm, balmy coasts. And the location of ancient surfing places coincides very closely with the location of these coastal settlements and with areas of population density. The maps of "Surfing Places in Ancient Hawai'i" [fig. 2–4] show a profusion along the Kona coast on the island of Hawai'i. When the first European explorers arrived, this particular coast was the major population center, not only for the Big Island but for the whole group. Together with the Waikīkī district of O'ahu, it was also

SURFING PLACES OF ANCIENT HAWAII

Where did the Hawaiians surf in the old days? Many of the old names can be found in traditional songs, chants, and legends in which surfing contests, the wave-riding feats of champions, romantic encounters, and other events revolving around surfing at a particular place are mentioned. Also useful are the writings of such great nineteenth-century Hawaiian historians as John Papa I'i and Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau. Although these sources usually give the specific name of the surfing break, sometimes they only mention the geographical region (usually a bay, point, or land section) where surfing was practiced. The lists and maps of surfing spots for each island below were developed from these sources, as well as from a welcome gift to the authors from Mary Kawena Pukui of a stack of file cards on which she had written the names of surfing places that she had run across during her decades of translating and interpreting Hawaiian oral traditions and newspaper articles from the nineteenth century. Where possible, we have listed each surfing spot according to its general location as well as the specific name of the break, italicizing the latter. Where we have only one name, be it of a break or a more general geographical locale, it also has been italicized. Following the authoritative works of Pukui, Elbert, and Mookini (1974) and Pukui and Elbert (1986) listed in the bibliography, we have hyphenated the names to indicate the words embodied in each and have given literal translations where available.

Figure 2.

HAWAI'I

1 Nā-'ohaku, *Kūmoho*, "to rise (as water)"
2 East of Kauhola Point, *Hale-lua*, "pit house"
3 *Wai-manu*, "bird water"
4 *Wai-pi'o*, "curved water"
5 *Lau-pāhoehoe*, "smooth lava flat"
6 *Pāpa'i-kou*, "hut [in a] kou [grove]"
7 *Kapo'ai*, "to rotate or revolve" (as in a hula)
8 Pu'u'eo, *Pā-'ula*, "red enclosure"
9 Hilo Bay
  a *Āhua*, "heap'
  b *Huia*, "a type of high wave formed when two crests meet"
  c *Kai-palaoa*, "whale sea"
  d *Ka-hala-'ia*, "the sin of eating forbidden fish or meat"
  e *Kā-nuku-o-ka-manu* (near Waiākea), "the beak of the bird"
  f *Kāwili*, "to mix, blend, intertwine"
  g *Pi'ihonua*, "land incline"
10 Ke'eau, *Ka-loa-o-ka-'oma*, "the length of the oven"
11 Kai-mū, "gathering [at the] sea [to watch surfing]"
  a *Hō-'eu*, "mischief"
  b *Ka-poho*, "the depression"
12 Kala-pana
  a *Ā'ili*, "to struggle for breath, to pull"
  b *Ka-lehua*, "the expert"
13 Puna-lu'u, *Kāwā*, "distance"
14 Ka-'alu'alu Bay
  a *Pai-a-ha'a*, "lift and sway [of waves]"
  b *Kua'aua*, "big brother" (the outside surf for grown-ups)
  c *Kaina*, "little brother" (the inside surf for children)
15 East of Ka-lae (South Point), *Ka-pu'u-one*, "the sand hill"
16 *Ke'ei*
17 Nā-pō'opo'o
  a *Ka-pahu-kapu*, "the taboo drum"
  b *Kapukapu*, "regal appearance"
  c *Kukui*, "candlenut tree, torch"
18 Ke-ala-ke-kua, *Hiki-au*, "moving current" (opposite the l
  of the same name where Captain Cook was receiv
  personification of the god Lono)
19 Ke-au-hou (He'eia Bay)
  a *Ka-lapu*, "the ghost"
  b *Kaulu*, "ledge"
20 Kaha-lu'u
  a *Ka-lei-kini*, "the many leis"
  b *Kapu'a*, "the whistle"
21 Ke-olo-nā-hihi
  a *Ka-moa*, "the chicken"
  b *Kāwā*, "distance"
  c *Pu'u*, "peak"
22 Kai-lua
  a *'Au-hau-kea-'ē*
  b *Huihā* (opposite Kona Inn)
  c *Ka-maka-i'a*, "the fish eye"
  d *Ki'i-kau*, "placed image"
  e *Nā-'ōhule-'elua*, "the two bald heads"
23 *Honokāhau*, "bay tossing dew"
24 Mahai'ula, *Ka-hale-'ula*, "the red house"
25 Kawaihae, *Ka-pua-'ilima*, "the 'ilima flower"
26 Honoipu, *Pua-kea*, "white blossom"

NOT LOCATED:

27 Kohala, *Ho'olana*, "to cause to float"
28 Puna
  a *'Āwili*, "swirl"
  b *Ka-lālani*, "the row"
  c *Kala-loa*, "very rough"

Figure 2.

HAWAI'I

, *Kūmoho*, "to rise (as water)"
uhola Point, *Hale-lua*, "pit house"
"bird water"
curved water"
hoe, "smooth lava flat"
', "hut [in a] kou [grove]"
:o rotate or revolve" (as in a hula)
'ā-'ula, "red enclosure"

Āhua, "heap'
Huia, "a type of high wave formed when two crests meet"
Kai-palaoa, "whale sea"
Ka-hala-'ia, "the sin of eating forbidden fish or meat"
Kā-nuku-o-ka-manu (near Waiākea), "the beak of the bird"
Kāwili, "to mix, blend, intertwine"
Pi'ihonua, "land incline"
Ka-loa-o-ka-'oma, "the length of the oven"
, "gathering [at the] sea [to watch surfing]"
Hō-'eu, "mischief"
Ka-poho, "the depression"
na
Ā'ili, "to struggle for breath, to pull"
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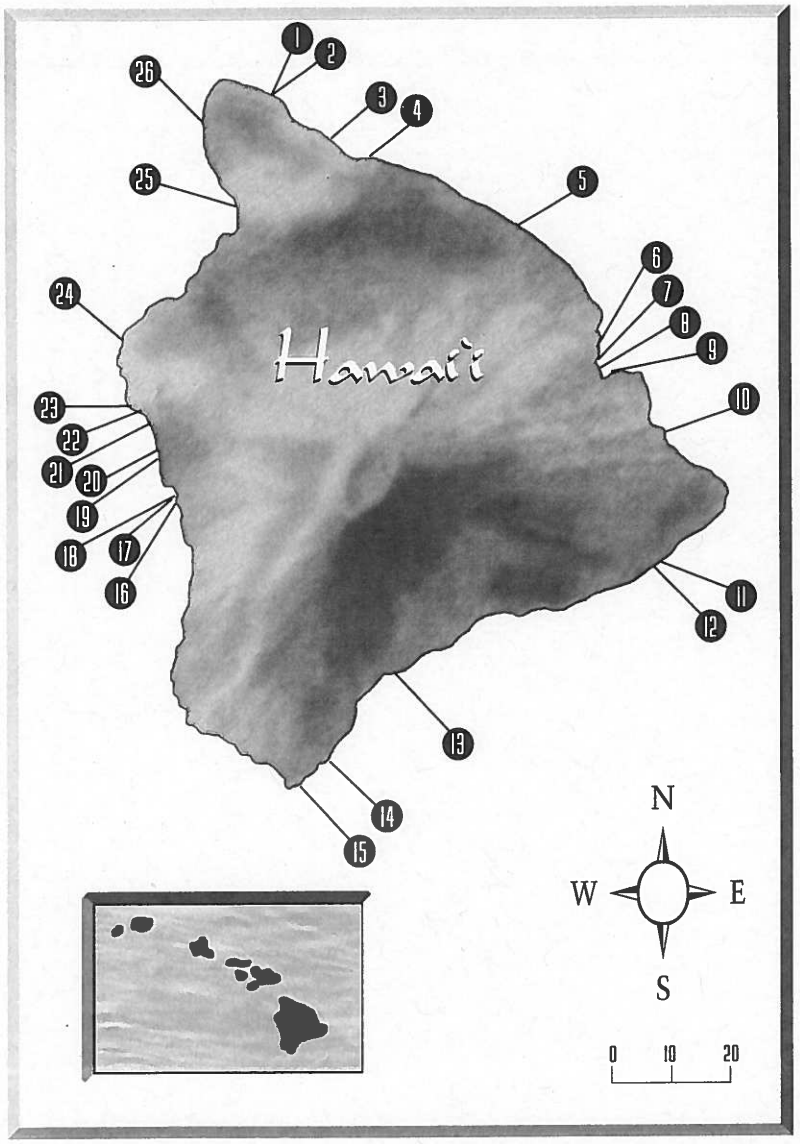

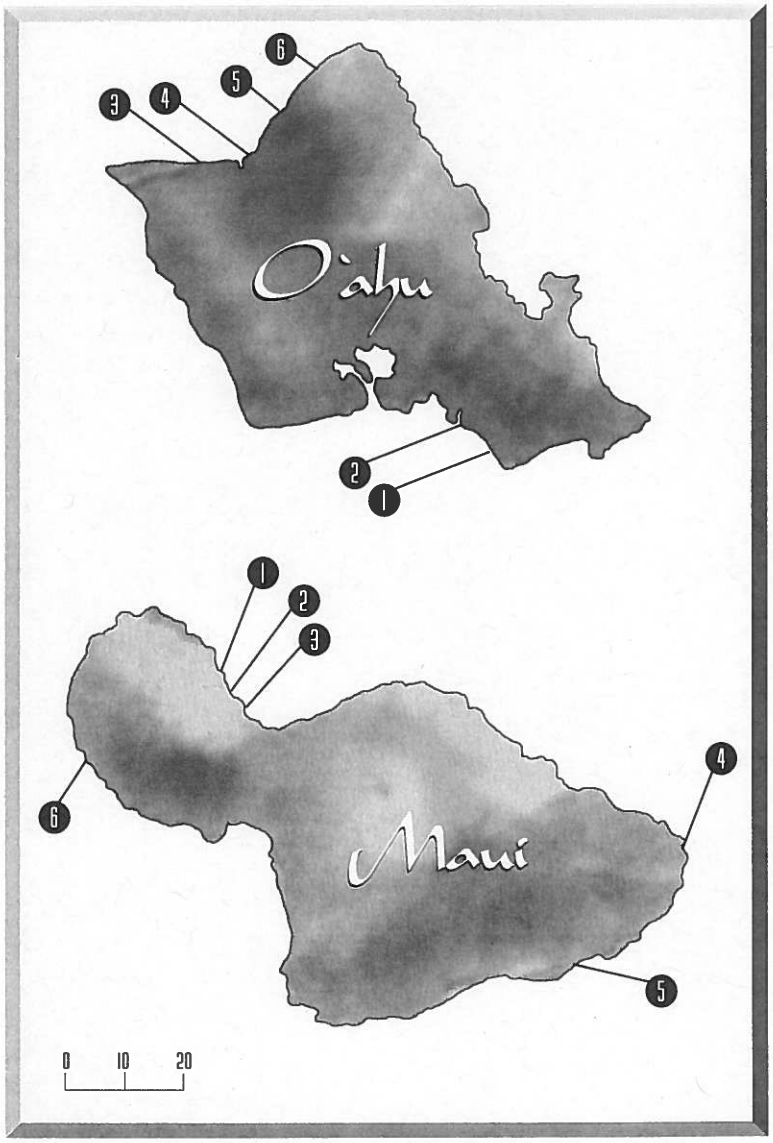

Figure 3.
O'ahu and Maui

O'AHU

1 Wai-kīkī (Although Waikīkī literally means "spouting water," it actually refers to the fresh water (*wai*) in the swamps behind the famous beach, not to the sea water (*kai*) of the surf offshore.)
- a *'Ai-wohi*, "royal ruler"
- b *Ka-lehua-wehe*, "the removed *lehua* [lei]"
- c *Ka-pua*, "the flower"
- d *Ka-puni*, "the surrounding"
- e *Mai-hiwa*

2 Hono-lulu
- a *'Ula-kua*, "back red"
- b *Ke-kai-o-Māmala*, "the sea of Māmala [a chiefess]"
- c *Awa-lua*, "double harbor"

3 Moku-lē'ia, *Pekue*

4 Wai-a-lua, *Pua-'ena*, "issue hot"

5 Wai-mea River mouth, *Wai-mea*, "reddish water"

6 Pau-malū Bay, *Pau-malū*, "taken secretly" (now known as "Sunset Beach")

NOT LOCATED

7 Wai-a-lua
- a *Ka-pāpala*, "the crest"
- b *Ka-ua-nui*, "the big rain"

8 Wai-'anae
- a *Ka-pae-kahi*, "the single landing"
- b *Kuala-i-ka-pō-iki*, "tumbling in the small night"

9 *Ka-'ihu-wa'a*, "the nose [of the] canoe"

MAUI

1 Wai-he'e
- a *Ka-hāhā-wai*, "the broken rivulets"
- b *Pala'ie*, "inconstant"
- c *Pōpō-'ie*, "*ie* vine cluster"

2 Wai-ehu
- a *'A'awa*, "wrasse fish"
- b *Niu-kū-kahi*, "coconut palm standing alone"

3 Wai-luku
- a *Ka'ahu*, "the garment"
- b *Ka'ākau-pōhaku*, "the north (or right hand side) stone"
- c *Ka-leholeho*, "the callus"
- d *Paukū-kalo*, "taro piece"

4 Hana Bay
- a *Ke-'anini*, "the stunted"
- b *Pū-hele* (*Pu'u-hele*), "traveling hill"

5 Kau-pō, *Moku-lau*, "many islets"

6 Lā-hainā
- a *'A'aka*, "roiled"
- b *Hau-ola*, "dew [of] life"
- c *'Ūhā-'ī lio*, "dog's hindquarters"
- d 'Uo

NOT LOCATED

7 Hana (either bay or district), *Ka-pua'i*, "the flow [of water]"

8 Lā-hainā
- a *Hale-lua*, "pit house"
- b *Ka-lehua*, "the expert"

Figure 4.
Kaua'i, Moloka'i, Ni'ihau, Lān

KAUA'I

1 Anahola, *Ka-nahā-wale*, "easily broken"

2 Kapa'a
- a *Ka-maka-iwa*, "the mother-of-pearl eyes"
- b *Po'o*, "head"
- c *Ko'a-lua*, "two coral heads"

3 Wai-lua
- a *Maka-iwa*, "mother-of-pearl eyes"
- b *Ka-'ō-hala*, "the thrust passing"

4 *Hana-pē pē*, "crushed bay" (due to land slides)

5 Wai-mea
- a *Kaua*, "war"
- b *Kua-lua*, "twice"
- c *Po'o*, "head"

NOT LOCATED

6 Hana-lei District
- a *Hawai'i-loa*, "long (or distant) Hawai'i"
- b *Ho'ope'a*, "to cross"
- c *Kū-a-kahi-uuu*, "standing like a fishing shri
- d *Makawa*
- e *Pu'u-lena*, "yellow hill"

7 Wai-'oli, *Mana-lau*, "many branches"

MOLOKA'I

1 Ka-laupapa, *Pua'ō*, "onslaught of dashing wave

NI'IHAU

1 Ka-malino, *Lana*, "floating"

2 Pu'uwai, *'Ōhi'a*, "*'ōhi'a* tree"

3 *Ka-uuu-nui*, "the large altar"

LĀNA'I

NOT LOCATED

1 *Hilole*

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O'AHU

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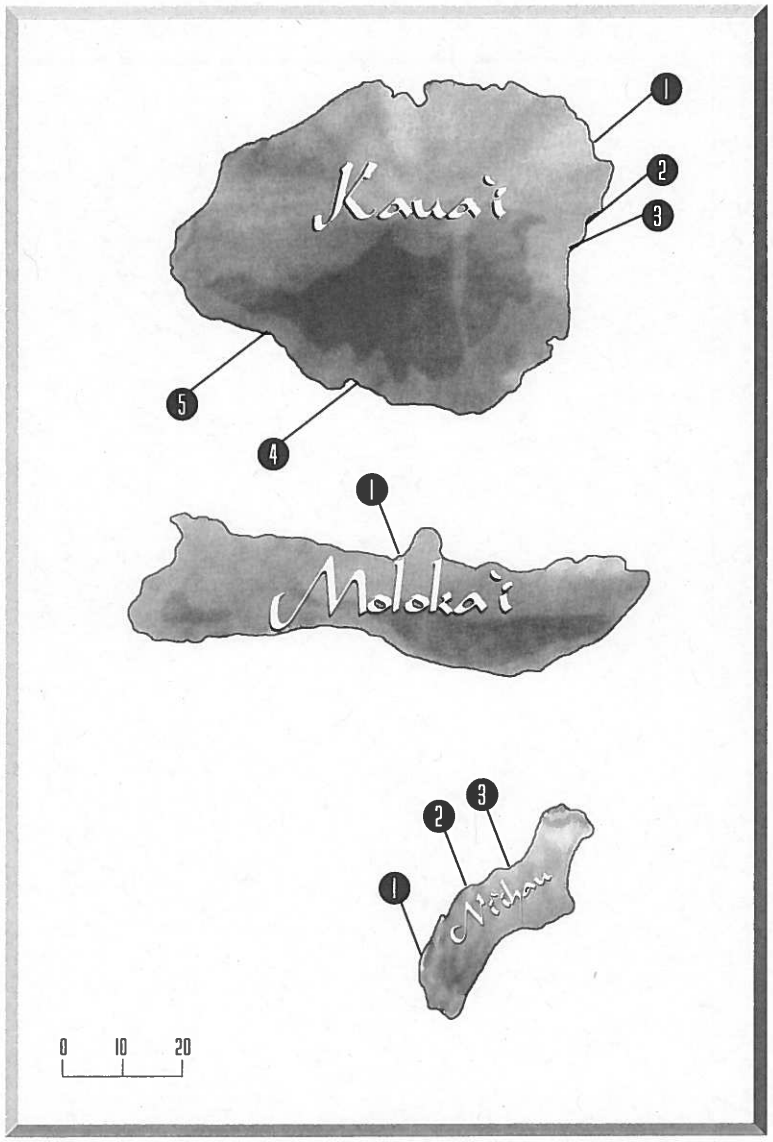
LĀNA'I

NOT LOCATED

1 *Hilole*



one of the most heavily surfed areas. It was along the Kona coast that Kamehameha I, the high chief who in the late 1790s and early 1800s united the islands into a single kingdom, learned to surf. And it was the surfing of the Hawaiians in Kona's Kealakekua Bay that so impressed Lieutenant King during his stay there in 1779 as an officer on Cook's expedition. Realizing the unique nature of the sport, King attempted to describe it in full:[3]

> Whenever, from stormy weather, or any extraordinary swell at sea, the impetuosity of the surf is increased to its utmost heights, they choose that time for their amusement, which is performed in the following manner: Twenty or thirty of the natives, taking each a long narrow board, rounded at the ends, set out together from the shore. The first wave they meet, they plunge under, and suffering it to roll over them, rise again beyond it, and make the best of their way, by swimming, out into the sea. The second wave is encountered in the same manner with the first. . . . As soon as they have gained by these repeated efforts, the smooth water beyond the surf, they lay themselves at length on their board, and prepare for their return. As the surf consists of a number of waves, of which every third is remarked to be always much larger than the others, and to flow higher on the shore, the rest breaking in the intermediate space, their first object is to place themselves on the summit of the largest surge. . . . If by mistake they should place themselves on one of the smaller waves, which breaks before they reach the land, or should not be able to keep their plank in a proper direction on the top of the swell, they are left exposed to the fury of the next, and, to avoid it, are obliged again to dive and regain their place, from which they set out. Those who succeed in their object of reaching shore, have still the greatest danger to encounter. The coast being guarded by a chain of rocks, with, here and there, a small opening between them, they are obliged to steer their boards through one of these, or, in case of failure, to quit it, before they reach the rocks, and, plunging under the wave, make the best of their way back again. This is reckoned very disgraceful, and is also attended with the loss of the board, which I have often seen, with great horror, dashed to pieces, at the very moment the islander quitted it.*

Hawaiian shores still provide such places where the sea and the land meet to produce excellent surfing waves. Today [1966]comparative handfuls are visited regularly by modern surfers. But in old Hawaiian stories and songs, dozens of surfing areas and often individual breaks have been remembered on every island in the group. Although a surfboard is now a rare sight on the once-popular Kona coastline, or anywhere on the Big Island for that matter, early sources have revealed some fifty individual surfing places on the island of Hawai'i alone. For the other six inhabited islands, fifty-eight more locations formerly used for surfing have been discovered: eighteen in O'ahu, nineteen on Maui, sixteen on Kaua'i, three on Ni'ihau, one on Moloka'i, and one on Lāna'i.

Among these were two well-known breaks, Kaulu and Kalapu at Keauhou, Kona, where King Kamehameha III surfed when he visited his birthplace. And on the northernmost island of Kaua'i broke the famous curving surf of Makaiwa. According to leg
when high-ranking Tahitians and Hawaiians were
forth between their respective islands, a chief name
his wandering days by settling on Kaua'i "to live
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and is said to have replied with these words:

I walea i Kaua'i
I ka lā hiki a'e a pō iho,
I ke'eke'e a ka nalu o Makaiwa,
I kāhuli mai a ka pua kukui o Puna,
O ka waihalau o Wailua,
Noho no iā Kaua'i a make iā Kaua'i.

* This is taken from the official publication on Cook's third voyage which was heavily edited by Reverend John Douglas. He had the habit of adding material of his own and from other accounts of the voyage. King's original words are printed in Beaglehole (1967, vol. 1, p. 268) and are reproduced as an appendix in this book.

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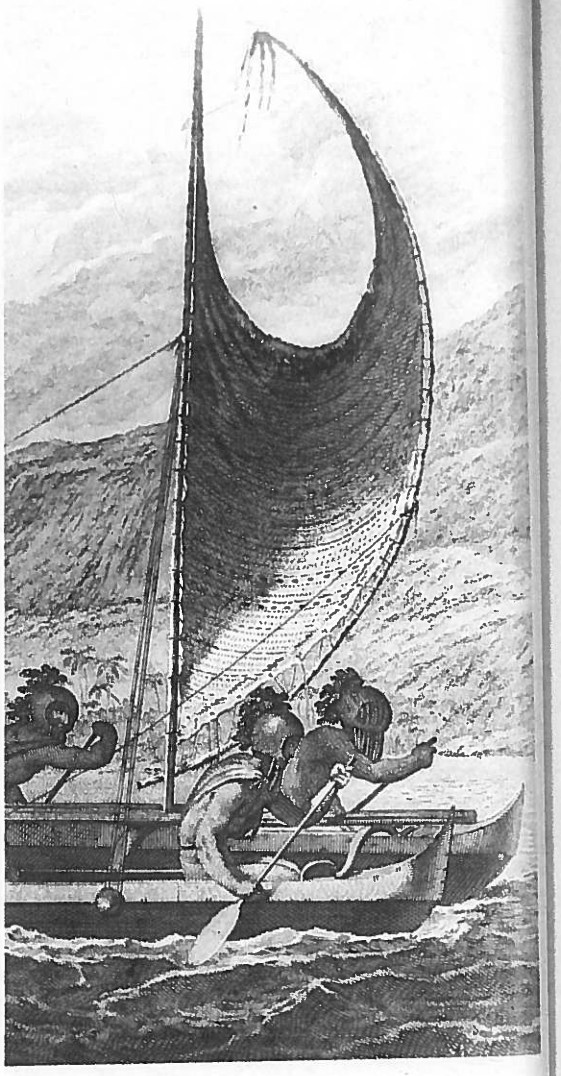
famous curving surf of Makaiwa. According to legend, centuries ago when high-ranking Tahitians and Hawaiians were sailing back and forth between their respective islands, a chief named Mo'ikeha ended his wandering days by settling on Kaua'i "to live and die" near this famous surf. After a long sojourn in Tahiti, Mo'ikeha had sailed north in his double-hulled canoe to the island of Hawai'i and then island-hopped along the chain until he came to Kaua'i, the northernmost inhabited island. When Mo'ikeha and his companions came ashore at Wailua Bay, a big surf was running and the people were gathering to ride the swells of Makaiwa just offshore. Mo'ikeha joined them in their sport, and while enjoying the waves, the handsome stranger was spied by two sisters, Ho'oipokamalani and Hinau'u, who just happened to be the daughters of the ruling chief of Kaua'i. Mo'ikeha in turn was taken by their beauty and soon thereafter married both of them. Later, upon the death of his father-in-law, he became the ruling chief of the island. As Mo'ikeha neared the end of his life, he longed to see once more his Tahitian son La'a, and so he sent his Kaua'i-born son Kila to Tahiti to fetch La'a. After a long sail and many adventures, Kila finally reached Tahiti. Upon identifying himself as a son of Mo'ikeha, he was asked by the Tahitians about the fate of his father and is said to have replied with these words:

I walea i Kaua'i
I ka lā hiki a'e a pō iho,
I ke'eke'e a ka nalu o Makaiwa,
I kāhuli mai a ka pua kukui o Puna,
O ka waihalau o Wailua,
Noho no iā Kaua'i a make iā Kaua'i.

He is dwelling in ease in Kaua'i
Where the sun rises and sets,
Where the surf of Makaiwa curves and bends,
Where the kukui blossoms of Puna change,
Where the waters of Wailua stretch out,
He will live and die on Kaua'i.[4]

Another well-known surf called Kalehuawehe breaks at Waikīkī, the famous surfing spot on O'ahu's southern shore. Here a few times a year huge swells march up from the south to provide a moving wave front that can sometimes be taken all the way to the beach. A ride on a twenty-to-thirty-foot wave from Kalehuawehe—or "Outside Castles," as it became known in the 1920s and 1930s—was considered the ultimate experience by the surfers of that era. According to legend the name Ka-lehua-wehe (the removed lehua) was inspired by a surfer who while riding at this break removed his lei made from lehua blossoms and presented it to a chiefess who was also riding there.

Several miles down the coast past Waikīkī there was a break called Ke-kai-o-Māmala (The Sea of Māmala). It broke through a narrow entrance to what is now Honolulu harbor straight out from a beautiful coconut grove called Honoka'upu and provided some of the finest waves in Kou (an early name for the Honolulu area). The break was named after Māmala, a famous surfer and a prominent O'ahu chiefess. She was a *kupua*, a demigod or hero with supernatural powers who could take the form of a beautiful woman, a gigantic lizard, or a great shark. According to legend, she was first married to another kupua, the shark-man Ouha; but then Honoka'upu, who owned the coconut



VOYAGE TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN (1784).

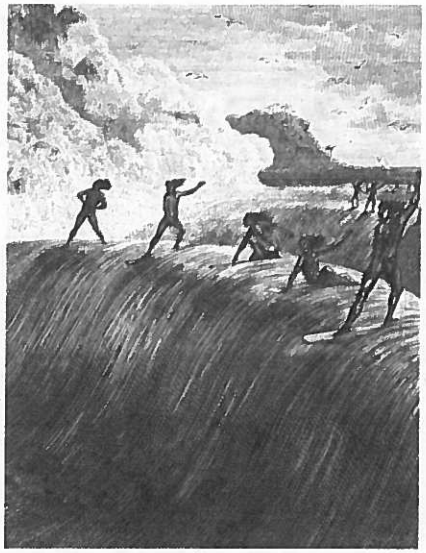
grove, chose her to be his wife, and so Māmala left Ouha. Angered by this and ridiculed by women in his attempts to regain his wife, Ouha cast off his human form and became the great shark god of the coast between Waikīkī and Koko Head. The beautiful Māmala was remembered afterward in the surfing place named for her and in a song about her triangular love affair called the *Mele* (song) *of Honoka'upu*:

The surf rises at Ko'olau,
Blowing the waves into mist,
Into little drops,
Spray falling along the hidden harbor.
There is my dear husband Ouha,
There is the shaking sea, the running sea of Kou,
The crab-like sea of Kou. . . .
My love has gone away. . . .
Fine is the breeze from the mountain.
I wait for you to return, . . .
Will the lover [Ouha] return?
I belong to Honoka'upu,
From the top of the tossing surf waves. . . .[5]

On the north shore of O'ahu, some forty miles from Kekaiomāmala, there was a ferocious surf known in the old days throughout the islands for its huge and thundering waves. Today it has the same reputation among modern surfers; it is called Sunset Beach. In earlier times it was called Paumalū, which literally means "taken secretly," referring to how a woman who caught more octopus than was permitted had her legs bitten off by a shark. And according to legend, a prince of Kaua'i named Kahikilani crossed the hundred miles of open sea between his home and O'ahu just to prove his prowess in the great Paumalū surf.[6]

As soon as he arrived he started surfing. Day after day he perfected his skill in the jawlike waves. As he rode he was watched by a bird maiden with supernatural powers who lived in a cave on a nearby mountain. She fell in love with the prince and sent bird messengers to place an orange lehua lei around his neck and bring him to her. By flying around his head, the messengers guided Kahikilani to the bird maiden's cave. Enchanted, he spent several months with her—until the return of the surfing season. Then the distant sizzle and boom of the waves at Paumalū were too much for Kahikilani to resist, and he left the maiden, but only after promising never to kiss another woman. However, the excitement of the rising surf must have clouded his memory because almost as soon as he was riding again, a beautiful woman came walking along the white sand. She saw him there, waited until he rode to shore, placed an ilima lei around his neck, and kissed him. His vow was broken. He thought nothing of it and paddled back out to the breaking waves, but the bird messengers were watching. They flew to tell their mistress of his infidelity. When she heard their report, the bird maiden ran to the beach with a lehua lei in her hand. Snatching the ilima lei from Kahikilani's neck, she replaced it with the one made from lehua blossoms. As she ran back to her cave, he chased her. That was the last Kahikilani saw of the bird maiden, though, for halfway up the mountain he was turned to stone.*

*Kahikilani still sits today with a petrified lehua lei around his neck on a barren ridge above Paumalū Bay, less than a mile from the Kamehameha Highway. Someone has renamed his image the George Washington Stone.



LEGENDS TELL US THAT THE WĀHINE OF EARLY HAWAI'I WERE JUST AS ADEPT IN THE SURF AS THE MEN, JUST AS READY "TO PLACE THEMSELVES," AS LIEUTENANT KING TELLS US, "ON THE SUMMIT OF THE LARGEST SURGE." THIS ENGRAVING APEARED IN AN 1877 BOOK ON THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD.

This tale may have been a warning to faithless lovers or it may have instructed the serious surfer not to mix surfing and seduction. Whatever its message, it is evidence that long ago Hawaiians rode the steep waves at Paumalū, and it is upon such legends, meles, and other early accounts that our maps of old surfing spots are based.

In addition to these more than one hundred surfs, writings and meles also reveal another gauge of the sport's ancient importance: vocabulary. Appendix A provides a list of forty-one terms, and although this probably represents only a portion of the traditional surfing glossary, it is sufficient to suggest the Hawaiian's need for adequate self-expression on the subject of riding ocean waves. Some of the definitions of these terms follow here:

alaia: a thin, broad type of surfboard good for fast-breaking surf

he'e: to slide; to surf

he'e nalu: to ride a surfboard; surfing; literally wave-sliding

nalu: a wave; surf

kīpapa: the prone position of riding a surfboard; to surf prone

kūlana nalu: the place where the waves swell up and the surfer paddles to catch them

lala: riding at an angle; diagonal surf or surfing

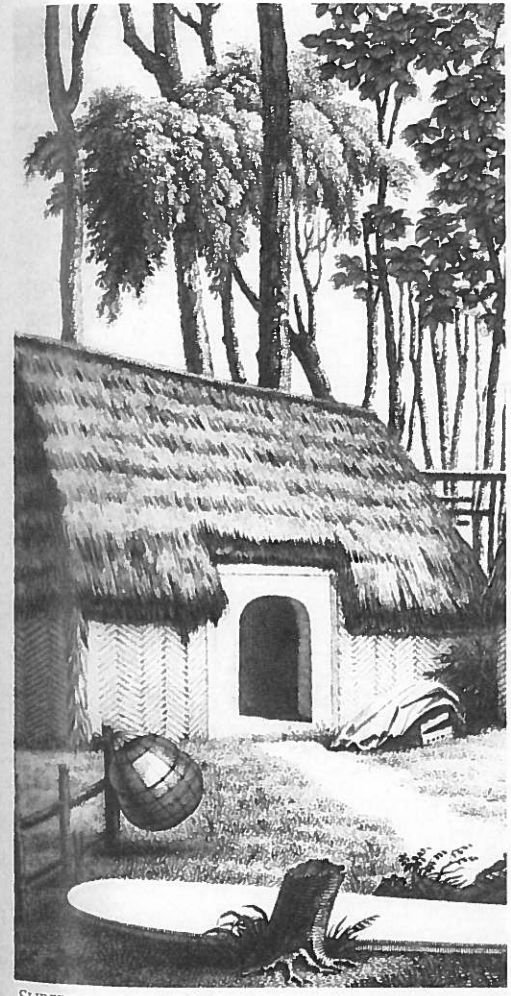
lele wa'a: canoe-leaping, jumping off a canoe with a surfboard onto a wave

olo: a very long, narrow but thick type of surfboard good for long, low swells (said to have been reserved for the chiefly class)

papa he'e nalu: a surfboard; literally a board [for] wave-sliding

With this rich vocabulary and with the great number of surfing places throughout the islands, one begins to understand why the sport appeared to its first European observers as "a national pastime."

It has already been mentioned that all classes, ages, and both sexes enjoyed riding waves. Although early accounts do not mention who surfed the most, there are numerous references to women surfing. In contrast to today when women are just beginning to take the sport up in earnest, a large percentage of women (*wāhine* in Hawaiian) in early Hawai'i were skillful surfers, and sometimes champions. A number of early engravings of the sport show island wāhine perched on surfboards at the top of a curling wave; and as we have seen, the famous O'ahu surf called Kekaiomāmala was named after a woman surfer. The 1896 issue of *Thrum's Hawaiian Annual* pays this tribute to wāhine surfers:



SURFBOARDS WERE AMONG THE PRIZED POSSESSIONS OF H
SHOWS THE HOUSES OF KĀLAIMOKU, A HIGH OF

> Native legends abound with the exploits of those who attained distinction among their fellows by their skill and daring in this sport, indulged in alike by both sexes; and frequently too—as in these days of intellectual development—the gentler sex carried off the highest honors.[7]

This equality and sexual freedom added zest to the sport and were important to its widespread popularity. No doubt many an amorous Hawaiian, who on some day didn't feel at all like surfing, found himself paddling for the breaker line in pursuit of his lady love, knowing full well that if a man and woman happened to ride the same wave together, custom allowed certain intimacies when they returned to the beach. More formal courtship was also carried out in the surf, when a man or woman tried to woo and win a mate by performing on the waves. Hawaiian legends abound in tales of thwarted and successful love affairs, and surfing played a part in many of them. Great romances could blossom or fade with the rising and falling of the ocean swells. Passionate adventures of champion surfers and famous courtships that began on the edge of the ocean were recorded in Hawai'i's abundant oral traditions. Many of these words were written down in the last century by the first generation of literate Hawaiian scholars.

THIS IDEALIZED WAHINE WAS SKETCHED BY JACQUES ARAGO IN HAWAI'I AROUND 1819 AND APPEARED IN HIS *RECOLLECTIONS OF A BLIND MAN*, AN ACCOUNT OF A TOUR AROUND THE WORLD. IN 1820 CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES BEGAN ARRIVING IN THE ISLANDS, AND WITH THE ENSUING "INCREASE IN MODESTY," SCENES LIKE THIS ONE WERE SELDOM SEEN AGAIN.

For example, in *The Hawaiian Romance of Lā'ieikawai*, first published in Hawaiian by Haleole in 1863, Hauailiki, a champion surfer from the island of Kaua'i traveled to Ke'eau, Hawai'i, to court the lovely Lā'ieikawai.[8] On the fifth day of his stay, after all attempts to attract her attention had failed, he decided to try impressing her with his famous skill on a surfboard. He paddled out where he was sure she would see him. After waiting until all the other surfers had ridden away, he caught a great wave and sped gracefully to shore. Neither this spectacular ride nor the following ones earned even a glance from the beautiful maid. As a last resort, Hauailiki left his board in the sand and went body-surfing. He performed so well on several waves that Lā'ieikawai finally called him to her. As was her custom for those who surfed well, she presented him with a lehua lei. But this small token was all he ever received from her for his championship skill, and Hauailiki returned to Kaua'i empty-handed.

In another legend of courtship, the surfer in the story is a woman, Kelea, from Maui. A beautiful sister of the island's ruling chief, Kelea was famed as the most graceful and daring surf rider in the kingdom. While surfing one day at Lāhainā, she accepted the offer of a visiting O'ahu chief to ride waves in his canoe. Before they had caught many waves a sudden squall came up and blew the small craft out to sea, and Kalamakua, the visiting chief, took advantage of the storm to abduct her. As they sailed away, Kelea was told she would be the

KA'AHUMANU, EXPERT SURFER AN

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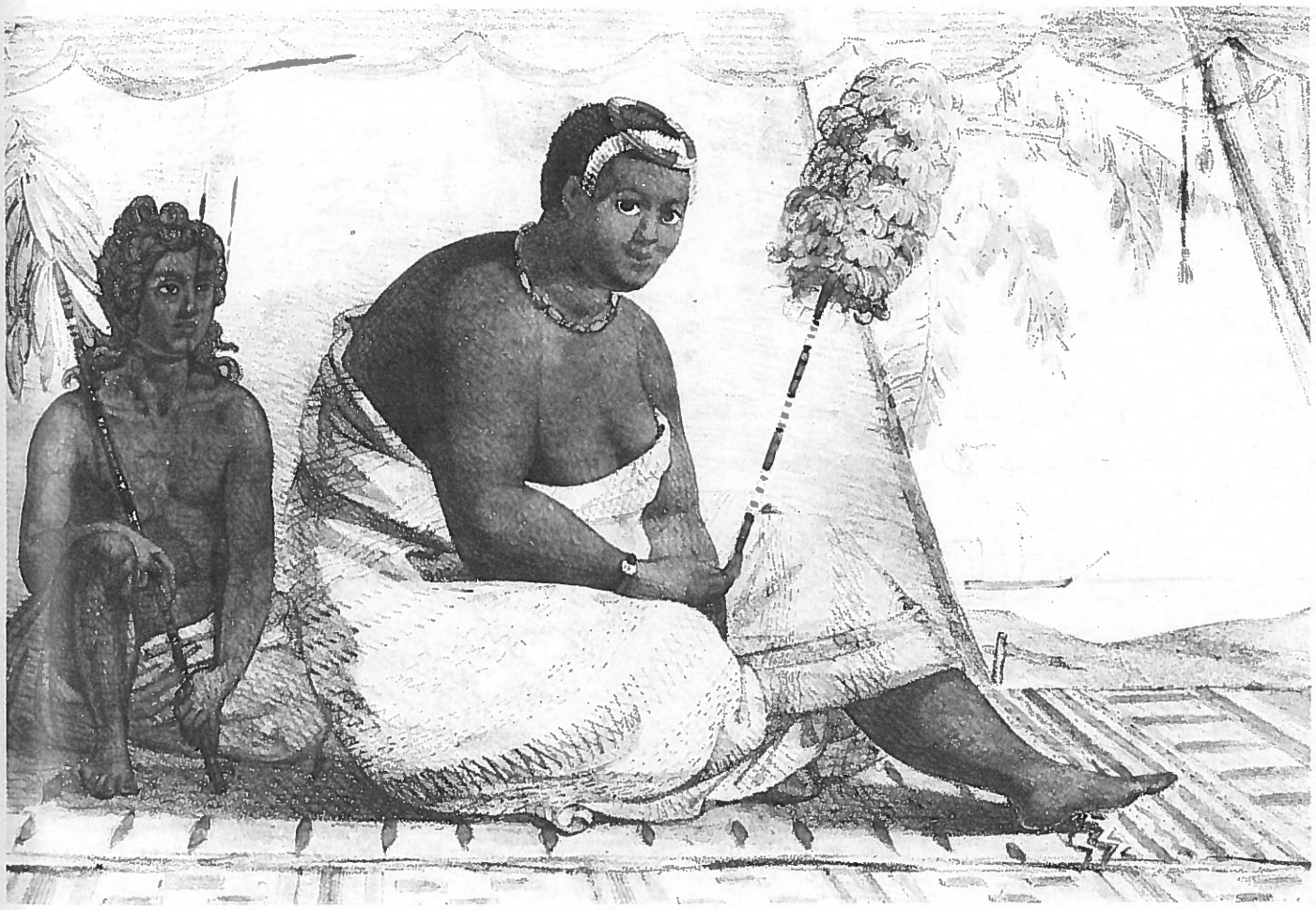

KA'AHUMANU, EXPERT SURFER AND FAVORITE WIFE OF KAMEHAMEHA, FROM *VOYAGE PITTORESQUE* BY LOUIS CHORIS (1822).
PHOTO COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

wife of Lolāle, high chief of O'ahu. At first she was infuriated, but finally she gave in to the situation and willingly became the high chief's wife. Unfortunately, Lolāle disliked the sea and preferred living inland. Thus confined far from the ocean, Kelea longed for the surf and was only happy on her occasional visits to the white beaches at 'Ewa, where she rode with Kalamakua. At last in desperation she vowed to return to her native island and leave Lolāle forever. On her return to Maui, however, she stopped at 'Ewa for one last wave, and Kalamakua proposed to her. Kelea accepted and so became the wife of the chief and fellow-surfer who had first stolen her away.[9]

AN ENGRAVING OF THE HIGH CHIEF AND GREAT SURFER KAMEHAMEHA I, ALSO FROM *VOYAGE PITTORESQUE* BY LOUIS CHORIS. PHOTO COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

THE ALI'I

Of all the Hawaiians who surfed, it was the *ali'i* or hereditary chiefly class who claimed the highest reputation for dedicated proficiency with board and wave. Freed from the daily chores of farming and fishing, the ali'i embraced the challenge of such sports as surfing, *hōlua*-sledding,* and canoe-leaping. They were a majestic aristocracy, often taller, broader, and stronger than the commoners. Their status as leaders depended, in part, on their strength and stamina. Strenuous sports such as surfing therefore served to keep them fit for the physical requirements of their chiefly position, as well as to furnish them with many hours of enjoyment.

Typical of the ali'i was Kaumuali'i, ruling chief of Kaua'i, whom the British missionary Ellis reported to be one of the finest surfers in all the islands. Concerning two chiefs from the island of Hawai'i, Ellis wrote:

> "We have seen Karaimoku and Kakioeva, some of the highest chiefs in the island, both between fifty and sixty years of age, and large corpulent men, balancing themselves on their long and narrow boards, or splashing about in the foam, with as much satisfaction as youths of sixteen."[10]

King Kamehameha I was trained in his youth to surf with both canoe and board, and he and his favorite wife, Ka'ahumanu, were experts on waves, especially at the sport of *lele wa'a* or canoe-leaping. In lele wa'a, the surfer leaped from a canoe with his or her board into a cresting ocean swell and rode it to shore. It was a good trick when you consider that the board of an ali'i might weigh well over one hundred pounds.

Often a surf-riding chief had a personal surf chant that proclaimed his glory and skill. It had to be delivered by a chanter, and every chief kept one in his retinue. On one occasion such a chant not only glorified the chief but saved his life as well.

Naihe was a champion surfer of Ka'ū on the island of Hawai'i. According to legend, Naihe was so expert a surfer that his fellow chiefs grew jealous. They plotted to lure him into a surfing contest and then kill him. After inviting Naihe to a match at Hilo, they secretly agreed that no participant, once he had paddled out to the breakers, could return to the beach until he heard his personal chant from the shore.

* The art of sliding down grassy slopes or specially constructed stone ramps covered with dirt and grass, using a long, narrow wooden sled (*papa hōlua*).

The contest had already started when Naih
his chanter was with him, Naihe, in ignorance o
the old woman sleep while he paddled out. He
water when he learned of the rule and was, ther
offshore. But a chief from nearby Puna decided t
servant to wake Naihe's chanter. When she lear
plight, she rushed to the beach. With tears stream
ered cheeks, the old woman stood on shore and

The great waves, the great waves rise in Kon
Bring forth the loin cloth that it may be on d
The ebbing tide swells to set the loin cloth fl
The loin cloth, Hoaka, that is worn on the be
It is the loin cloth to wear at sea, a chief's loi
Stand up and gird on the loin cloth
The day is a rough one, befitting Naihe's surf
He leaps in, he swims, he strides out to the v
The waves that rush hither from Kahiki.
White-capped waves, billowy waves,
Waves that break into a heap, waves that bre
The surf rises above them all,
The rough surf of the island
The great surf that pounds and thrashes
The foamy surf of Hikiau,
It is the sea on which to surf at noon,
The sea that washes the pebbles and corals a

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The contest had already started when Naihe arrived. Although his chanter was with him, Naihe, in ignorance of the secret pact, let the old woman sleep while he paddled out. He was already in the water when he learned of the rule and was, therefore, marooned far offshore. But a chief from nearby Puna decided to aid him and sent a servant to wake Naihe's chanter. When she learned of her master's plight, she rushed to the beach. With tears streaming down her withered cheeks, the old woman stood on shore and chanted:

The great waves, the great waves rise in Kona,
Bring forth the loin cloth that it may be on display,
The ebbing tide swells to set the loin cloth flying,
The loin cloth, Hoaka, that is worn on the beach,
It is the loin cloth to wear at sea, a chief's loin cloth,
Stand up and gird on the loin cloth
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The sea that washes the pebbles and corals ashore. . . .[11]

Naihe was thus allowed to return to shore, and the plot to kill him was foiled. In the late nineteenth century, King Kalākaua, the last king of Hawai'i, adopted Naihe's surfing chant to serve as his own. Queen Emma, another member of nineteenth-century Hawaiian royalty, also had a surf chant in her honor.

Ali'i privileges in the sport went far beyond owning personal surfing chants. In one legend, for instance, a handsome surfer is almost executed for riding on the same wave at Waikīkī with a high-ranking chiefess.[12] One festive day Pīkoi, a kupua hero famed for his beauty as well as his skill at shooting rats with bow and arrow, wandered down to what is now the Moana Hotel beach. In the waves offshore a high-ranking chiefess, the wife of the island's ruling chief, was surfing with her retinue. Pīkoi, wearing a striking lei made from orange lehua blossoms, watched the chiefess catch a high blue-green wave and ride it all the way to the water's edge in front of him. As she walked ashore he asked to borrow her board, but the chiefess said the board was *kapu* (taboo) to all but herself. If he rode it, she explained, her servants would kill him. Instead she offered him the board of a chief who had just surfed to shore behind her.

Pīkoi paddled out, but there were no good waves breaking except those reserved for the chiefess, so he allowed a wave to carry him into the forbidden surf. The chiefess, pleased by his great beauty, had entered the water again and was surfing alone. As he neared her board she asked for one of his orange lehua leis. He couldn't give her one because, as he said, "You are kapu."

"Nothing is kapu for me to receive," she replied. "It will only be kapu after I have worn it." Persuaded, Pīkoi lifted a garland from his neck and gave it to her. (Later, that part of Waikīkī's surf became known as Ka-lehua-wehe, "the removed lehua.")

Then Pīkoi asked the chiefess to ride to shore on the first wave of a huge set swelling behind them. He would follow on the second. But she waited, and when Pīkoi streaked past on the second wave, she paddled and caught it behind him. Realizing the danger of riding the same wave with the chiefess, he tried to cut across from that wave to another. She skillfully caught that one, too, and, unfortunately for Pīkoi, they glided to the beach together.

A great cry rose from the revelers on shore. "That boy has broken the kapu!" The ruling chief heard the shout, looked seaward, saw the glistening bodies of his wife and Pīkoi, and called his officers. Seizing Pīkoi as he stepped from his board, they beat him and were ready to kill him when he cried, "Stop! Wait until I have spoken with the high chief!"

They stopped and dragged him into the royal presence. As he pled his case someone recognized him as the famous rat-killer. To identify himself he immediately skewered four hundred rats on a single arrow in one shot. Then a chief recognized the accused as the brother of his wife, and Pīkoi was saved.

His near execution suggests that certain breaks or boards or both were reserved for the ali'i. Other evidence for chiefly privilege includes Ellis's observation from the 1820s that commoners avoided approaching a surfing place when the chiefs were enjoying themselves "lest they should spoil the sport" and indications that one of the two main types of surfboards were reserved for the ali'i.

Papa he'e nalu (wave-sliding board) was the general term for surfboards, of which there were two main types: *alaia* and *olo*. These share only one common feature: their lenticular cross-sections. In both, top and bottom were convex, tapering to thin rounded edges. Otherwise, as can be seen by glancing at the drawings of olo and alaia from Honolulu's Bishop Museum (fig. 5), they were radically different in form—and, as we shall explain, in function as well.

The alaia boards are round-nosed with a squared-off tail and very thin. The larger alaia boards in the Bishop's collection range from seven to twelve feet long, average eighteen inches in width, and are from a half inch to an inch and a half thick. (The museum's shorter alaia-shaped boards, which can be classified as bodyboards because of their lack of buoyancy, are similarly proportioned.) Most alaia boards that have survived are made from koa (*Acacia koa*), a fine-grained Hawaiian hardwood, although various writers state that alaia were also made from such light woods as breadfruit (*Artocarpus altila*) and wiliwili (*Erythrina sandwicensis*).

The olo is a very long, thick and heavy board, yet proportionately narrow. Although one nineteenth-century writer claimed that olo boards could be as long as four fathoms (twenty-four feet), the longest of the three olo in the Bishop Museum measures just over seventeen feet and is about sixteen and a half inches wide, five and three-quarters inches thick, and weighs more than 150 pounds. The board came from the collection of Prince Kūhiō, Hawai'i's delegate to the U.S. Congress immediately following annexation. It is made from imported pine. The other two olo boards in the Bishop Museum, one of which is featured in figure 5 as a type specimen of the olo, were owned by high chief Abner Pākī, a noted surfer who regularly rode at Waikīkī during the 1830s. Although both of Pākī's boards are made from koa, a number of nineteenth-century writers state that wiliwili wood was preferred for making olo boards because of its extreme lightness, which also makes it ideal for outrigger canoe floats. However, the

Figure 5.

Ancient Hawaiian Surfboards.

THESE FIVE BOARDS ARE TYPICAL OF THOSE USED BY EARLY SURFERS. THESE DIAGRAMS ARE TAKEN FROM BOARDS NOW PRESERVED IN THE BISHOP MUSEUM IN HONOLULU. THE SMALLEST WERE BODYBOARDS, PROBABLY USED BY CHILDREN. THE LARGEST, THE OLO, WERE SOMETIMES SIXTEEN FEET LONG OR MORE AND WERE USED EXCLUSIVELY BY CHIEFS. THE MOST POPULAR BOARD WAS THE SHORTER, THINNER ALAIA.

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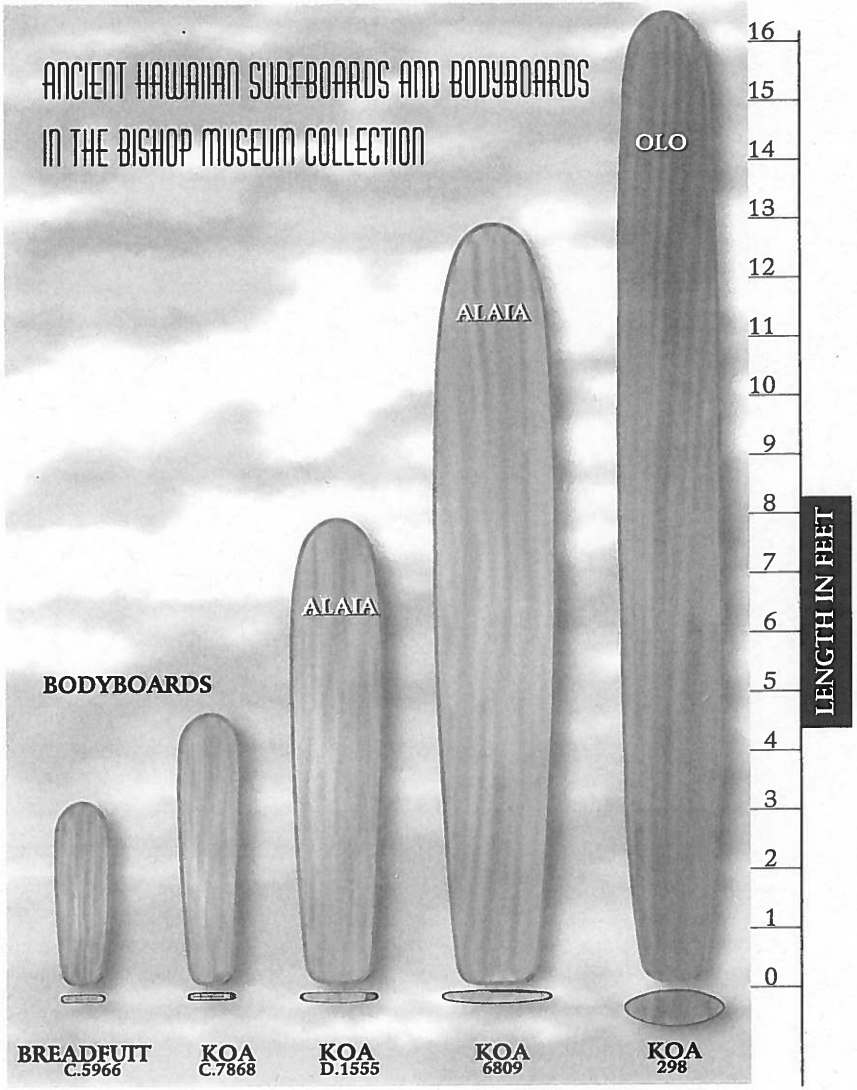

light, porous wiliwili is more perishable than koa, which probably explains why there are no wiliwili boards in the museum's collection.*

ABNER PĀKĪ (C. 1808–1855) WAS A HIGH CHIEF IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND A NOTED SURFER AT WAIKĪKĪ DURING THE 1830S. PHOTO COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

Because of its great length and buoyancy the olo was especially adapted for riding large, humping swells such as those that occur at Waikīkī. We have no eyewitness descriptions of olo surfing, but experiments conducted at Waikīkī during the 1930s with sixteen-foot hollow boards give us some insight into the advantages and disadvantages of such massive long boards. Their buoyancy allowed the rider to catch a swell long before it broke and much farther out to sea than was possible with shorter boards. Once on a wave, a surfer could slide with ease until long after the wave had crested and begun to flatten out. An olo might even catch a wave that began to peak but never broke, as often happens at Waikīkī when the swell is weak. Once on a wave, however, with the ride's angle set, the surfer could not make fast turns, especially when the wave grew steep. Also, a huge board was hard to paddle through breaking waves to the *kūlana nalu*, the take-off point, requiring a surfer to paddle clear around the surf line or, in the old days, to hitch a ride on a canoe to get in position beyond the breaking surf.

In contrast, the shorter and more maneuverable alaia board was ideally suited to the steeper, faster-breaking surf. Waikīkī's combination of long low swells and sandy shore is not common around the islands. Along the Kona coast of the island of Hawai'i, for example, one finds more often the rocky terrain described by Lieutenant King, with steep walls of water breaking closer to shore. The alaia's shorter length and thinness gave it the mobility needed to negotiate the sheer faces of such fast-breaking waves. Crucial was the technique called *lala* of sliding at an angle along the face of the moving swell. An eyewitness report of an Hawaiian on a seven-foot alaia board at Hilo, Hawai'i, in 1878 said:

> One instantly dashed in, in front of and at the lowest declivity of the advancing wave, and with a few strokes of the hands and feet established his position; then without further effort shot along the base of the wave eastward with incredible velocity. . . . his course was along the foot of the wave, and parallel to it. . . . so as soon as the bather had secured his position he gave a spring and stood on his knees upon the board, and just as he was passing us . . . he gave another spring and stood upon his feet, now folding his arms on his breast, and now swinging them about in wild ecstasy in his exhilarating ride.[13]

Such rapid alaia-adapted surf is by far the most common that breaks in Hawai'i, even today. The surfer, of course, needed an alert dexterity to ride successfully and avoid losing his or her board or smashing it on the rocks. But the alaia's shape made it possible for the rider to avoid the tumbling crests as well as the danger of "nosing in."

*It is fitting that Pākī's boards came to be preserved in the Bishop Museum, for this repository of Polynesian culture was founded as a memorial to his daughter, Mrs. Bernice Pauahi Bishop, a descendant of King Kamehameha.

AUTHOR BEN FINNEY WITH PART OF THE WORLD'S L

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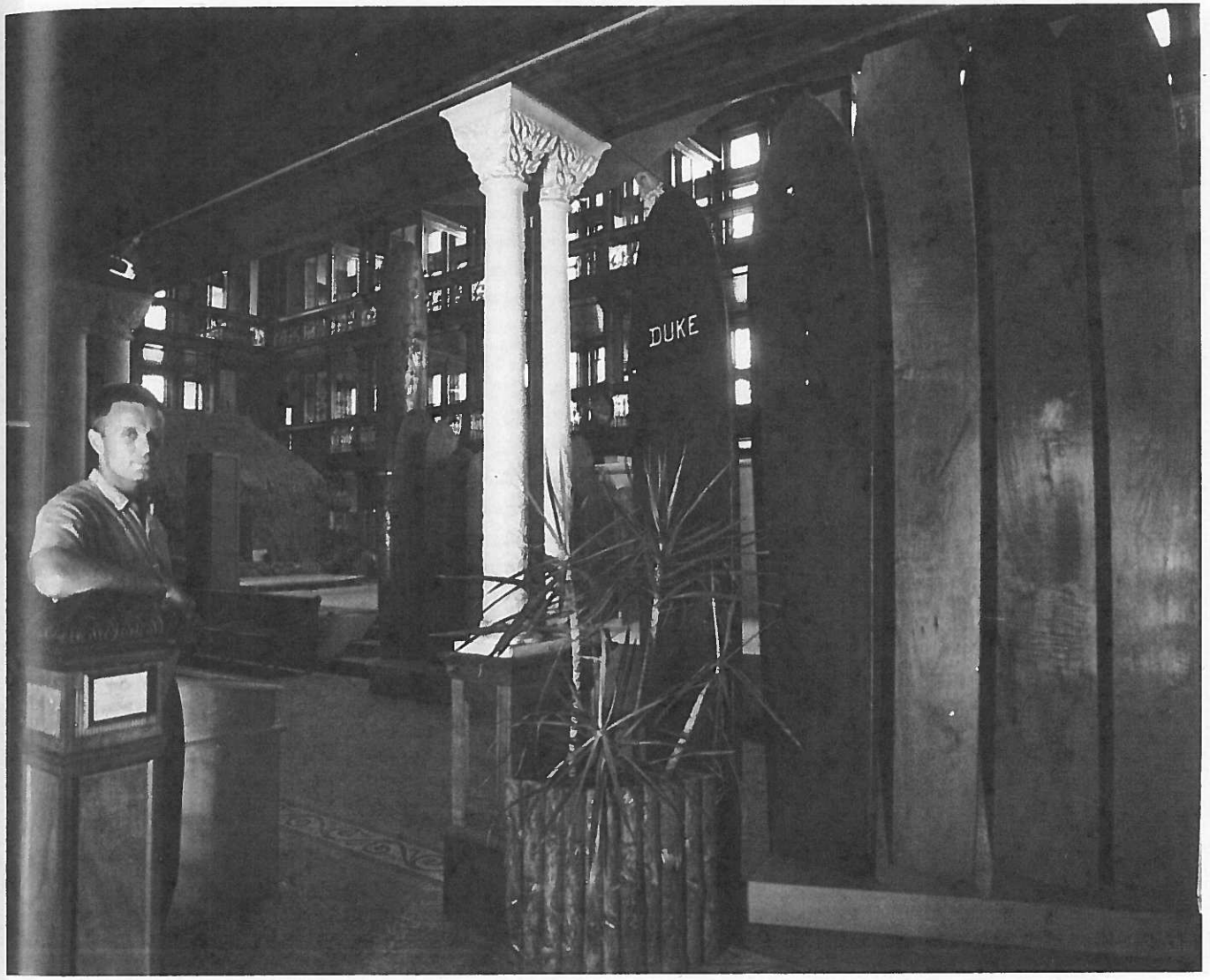

AUTHOR BEN FINNEY WITH PART OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST COLLECTION OF ANCIENT HAWAIIAN SURFBOARDS, IN THE BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

It was the board most suitable along the frequent rugged coasts, and it is no wonder that most of the ancient boards remaining (ten of thirteen in the Bishop Museum collection) are of the alaia type. All the early reports of this sport seem to focus on surfing alaia style, and many legends mention chiefs surfing along rocky shores where an olo board would be difficult to handle.

However, whereas both the chiefly class and commoners surfed on alaia boards, the right to ride the majestic olo boards may have been reserved exclusively for the ali'i. In a late-nineteenth-century account of surfing (see Appendix E), its Hawaiian author states unequivocally that "it is well know that the olo was only for the use of chiefs; none of the common people use it."[14] Although no other writers were so explicit on this point, excluding commoners from riding olo boards makes sense when we consider the structure of Hawaiian society along with the unique riding characteristics of these boards. In ancient Hawai'i the ali'i formed an exclusive class with special rights and privileges with respect to the commoners, the *maka'āinana*. So unequal were the two classes that a commoner might be put to death for transgressing, even accidentally, on the person or property of a high-ranking chief.[15] In such a highly stratified society it would be hard to imagine how a commoner, surfing at Waikīkī for example, could ride an olo board, particularly when chiefs were also surfing there. A commoner who had caught a large swell far outside and had taken his angle might have found himself bearing down on a chiefly surfer straining to catch the same swell with an alaia board or paddling out through the surf. Since the commoner would not have been able to turn an olo board fast enough, any chiefly surfer in his way would have been forced either to paddle furiously to avoid a collision or, if too late for that, to dive overboard to avoid injury—an unthinkable situation in ancient Hawaiian society.

Because of the difficulty of handling these huge boards, modern surfers have generally considered the olo a curiosity—interesting, but poorly adapted for fast-breaking waves. In the 1960s, however, surfers seeking a way to ride the untested fifty-foot monsters that crash into Ka'ena Point on O'ahu began to reconsider the olo's merits. Perhaps, they thought, in its extreme length and narrowness lies the secret. With their own big-wave boards, which measured eleven feet or so, they knew that even if they could catch a Ka'ena Point monster, they would only be able to do so just before it crested—and that they would die in the next moment when tons of water slammed over them. But they theorized that a long, buoyant olo might enable them to catch such a giant wave when the swell was still comparatively flat, then stand, take an angle, and ride across and out before it could reach its critical steepness.

No one has yet had the courage to test this. If ever proven it will certainly open the possibility that ancient Hawaiians surfed waves as big or perhaps bigger than those now attempted by surfers on O'ahu's north shore.

COMPETITION

Whichever board they chose, the chiefs took great pride in the skill, grace, speed, and courage with which they rode the Pacific's swells. They frequently performed in public, and such displays were not always to court a visiting chiefess from another island. Hawaiian surfers often exhibited their finest wave-riding style in fierce competition. This was, in fact, a major part of the game to early enthusiasts, and the betting that accompanied every contest was no doubt an important incentive for the practice of the sport.

Before a surfing contest in which chiefs were competing, a dog might be buried in an underground oven and baked, so that the contestants could periodically replenish their strengt
If the contest was one of pride, the chiefs woulc
tapa loincloths dyed red. When preliminaries w
bets were in, the competing surfers paddled out
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testants could periodically replenish their strength during the match. If the contest was one of pride, the chiefs would gird themselves in tapa loincloths dyed red. When preliminaries were over and all the bets were in, the competing surfers paddled out to a predetermined position to wait for a swell to come through. As soon as a large wave rose up behind them they paddled, caught it together, and rode until they reached a *pua* (buoy) anchored inshore. The first man to the pua won the heat. Probably several such rides determined the winner of the contest.

In addition to this surfer-versus-surfer competition, there was another kind of match, which pitted a chief's surfboard against a landlocked hōlua sled. At Keauhou on Hawai'i, in the 1960s one could still see a stone hōlua slide stretching several hundred yards down a mountain slope to the shore at He'eia Bay. A grass house once squatted at the bottom of the slide, and beyond the house, out to sea, a famous surf broke. During the competition, when a large wave approached the breaking place, someone would flash a white tapa flag from the grass house. Then a young chief at the top of the slide would run a few powerful steps, throw himself and his narrow sled belly-down on the slide, and plummet seaward. At the same time, out at sea, a surfer would catch the wave that had triggered the signal and race the sled to shore. The first to reach the grass hut was the winner.

Wagering on such matches, by contestants as well as spectators, was a favorite and often fanatic pastime that occasionally overshadowed the sport itself. "Surf-riding was a national sport of the Hawaiians," wrote the nineteenth-century Hawaiian scholar David Malo, "on which they were very fond of betting, each man staking his property on the one thought to be most skillful."[16] And, "Hawaiians were much addicted to gambling, even to the last article they possessed." This passion is unusual in comparison to Polynesia's other island groups, where betting was unknown or much less important. Overcome by the excitement of an ensuing contest, a Hawaiian might impetuously wager canoes, fishing nets and lines, tapa cloth, swine, and sometimes his own life or personal freedom, all on the outcome of the match.

The dangers of such a contest are illustrated in the legendary match that once took place between Umi-a-līloa, a great chief of Hawai'i, and Paiea, a lesser chief. Before he became high chief, Umi attended a surfing match at Laupāhoehoe, Hawai'i. While there he was challenged to a contest by Paiea. Because of the small wager Paiea proposed, Umi refused the offer. When Paiea upped his bet to four double-hulled canoes, Umi accepted. He then defeated Paiea and won the four canoes, but during the match Paiea's surfboard had clipped Umi on the shoulder, scratching off some skin. Umi said nothing at the time, but when he later came to power as high chief he had Paiea killed and sacrificed to his god at the *heiau* (temple) at Waipunalei.[17]

CONSECRATION, CONSTRUCTION, AND THE GODS

Surfing was, on one hand, a popular recreation. But when a scratch on the shoulder might lead to death, or, as in Naihe's case, when one's skill could excite jealous chiefs to an assassination plot, it could also be a rather serious affair. This was especially true as it entwined itself with other vital elements of Hawaiian culture. In this sense, it was connected with the ancient religion of the islands. Although surfing was not specifically a religious observance, it was, like other aspects of Hawaiian life, integrally involved with the gods and spirits of the day.

The observance of ritual began when a potential surfboard was still an image in the craftsman's mind; it began with the tree. When he had selected a suitable koa or wiliwili tree, a board builder placed

a red fish at its trunk. He then cut down the tree with a stone ax, dug a hole among the roots, and placed the fish therein with a prayer as an offering to the gods in return for the tree he was about to shape into a board. The construction and shaping of the surfboard that followed this ritual was an exacting task that required the experienced craftsmanship of professional board builders.

The trunk was first chipped away with an ax and roughly shaped to the desired dimensions. It was then pulled down to the beach and placed in a hālau (canoe house) for finishing work. To remove the uneven surface of ax marks, the board was smoothed with rough coral. Stone rubbers called *'ōahi* were used to polish the boards, much as canoe hulls were polished. As a finishing stain, the root of the ti plant or the juice of pounded kukui bark was used to give the completed board a dark, glistening luster. Stains were also obtained from the soot of burned kukui nuts, charcoal from burnt pandanus leaves, or the juices from young banana buds. To complete the process, a dressing of kukui nut oil was applied when the stain was dry, and the black, glossy board was ready. Before it was set in the water there were still other rites and ceremonies to be performed in dedicating the board to insure its wave-riding success. And although the common people often disregarded these observances, professional board builders followed them faithfully.

Once completed, a board is of little use to the surfer unless the surf is running. When the ocean was flat the Hawaiians took measures to secure the return of ridable waves. If a group of surfers wanted to address the ocean, they might gather on the beach, find strands of *pōhuehue* (beach morning glory), swing them around their heads together, and lash the surface of the water chanting in unison. One such surf chant has been recorded and translated as follows:

Kū mai! Kū mai! Ka nalu nui mai Kahiki mai,

Alo po'i pu! Kū mai ka pō huehue,

Hū ! Kaiko'o loa.

Arise! Arise, ye great surfs from Kahiki,

The powerful curling waves.

Arise with pōhuehue

Well up, long raging surf.[18]

Surfing also played a part in the annual celebration the Hawaiians called *Makahiki*. The great god Lono was the patron deity of those festivities. From mid October to early February, the Hawaiians stopped work, relaxed, and passed much of their time dancing, feasting, and participating in sports. Thousands gathered to watch the famous tournaments, which always included surfing, and a special god of sport (*akua pa'ani*) presided over each contest. Of such festivals and Hawaiian sports and games in general, Kenneth Emory wrote:

> No important contest was engaged in without approaching the gods with prayers and offerings to win their favor. Some god presided over every sport. When a man felt he was in harmonious relations with the mysterious forces about him he was quite likely to accomplish superhuman feats of strength and skill.[19]

Among the many Hawaiian gods and their multitudinous aspects, however, there is no specific mention of a special god for surfing. In Tahiti, Ellis tells us, the presiding god of surfing was Huaouri. Unfortunately, his Hawaiian counterpart, who can only be inferred, remains nameless and unknown. But this possibility of a surfing god is strengthened by the existence on the island of Hawai'i of a temple that was dedicated to surfing.

A heiau was an ancient Hawaiian shrine or pla might be built in connection with a community, an or a certain activity. At Kahalu'u Bay on the Kona co structure built of lichen-spotted black lava rock, whicl to local Hawaiians questioned in the early 1900s a where one might pray for good surf.[20] The stone said to be convenient for rinsing salt water from one ing. This structure, called Ku'emanu Heiau, still e: well preserved. It consists mainly of an upper sto rests on a larger foundation. A deep, stone-lined wa bathing, is sunk into one side of the foundation terr legends suggest was well known to ancient Hawa offshore at Ku'emanu, directly in front of the heia races are so aligned that from the upper level, spect watch surfers riding waves less than a hundred yar

This site is remarkably similar to Keolonāhihi H the sea at Hōlualoa, a few miles north of Kahalu'u pool and bleacherlike terraces and faces a once w area. King Kamehameha learned to surf at Keolonāhi favored the surrounding lands for their abundant fo the presence of good surfing waves.

These old heiau are overgrown and obscured in vegetation. Even so, sitting now on those stony ter the still reflection of the bathing pool or watching a crumble just offshore, one cannot help but specul

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ened by the existence on the island of Hawai'i of at least one stone temple that was dedicated to surfing.

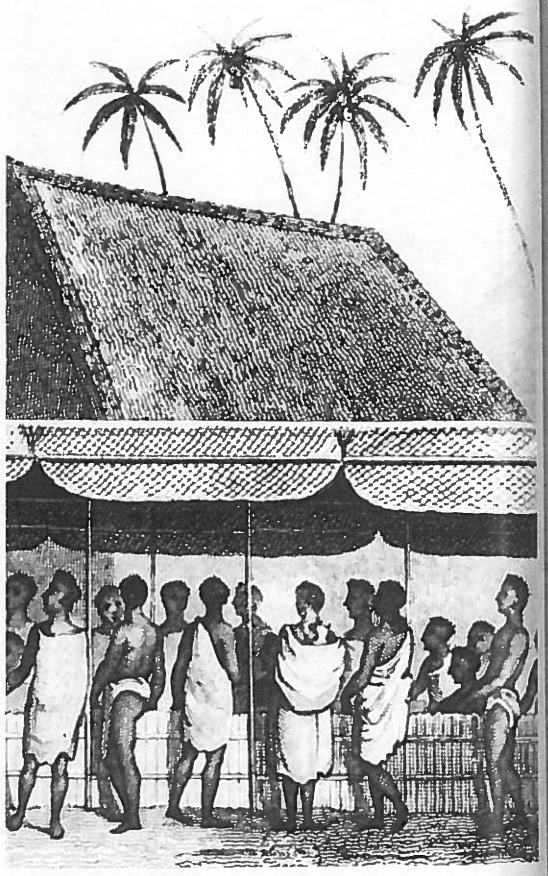
A heiau was an ancient Hawaiian shrine or place of worship. It might be built in connection with a community, an individual deity, or a certain activity. At Kahalu'u Bay on the Kona coast stands a large structure built of lichen-spotted black lava rock, which was well known to local Hawaiians questioned in the early 1900s as a surfing heaiu where one might pray for good surf.[20] The stone pool nearby was said to be convenient for rinsing salt water from one's body after surfing. This structure, called Ku'emanu Heiau, still exists today, fairly well preserved. It consists mainly of an upper stone terrace which rests on a larger foundation. A deep, stone-lined water pool, ideal for bathing, is sunk into one side of the foundation terrace. A surf, which legends suggest was well known to ancient Hawaiians, still breaks offshore at Ku'emanu, directly in front of the heiau. The stone terraces are so aligned that from the upper level, spectators might easily watch surfers riding waves less than a hundred yards away.

This site is remarkably similar to Keolonāhihi Heiau, which fronts the sea at Hōlualoa, a few miles north of Kahalu'u. It also features a pool and bleacherlike terraces and faces a once well-known surfing area. King Kamehameha learned to surf at Keolonāhihi, and local chiefs favored the surrounding lands for their abundant food resources and the presence of good surfing waves.

These old heiau are overgrown and obscured in places by tropical vegetation. Even so, sitting now on those stony terraces, gazing into the still reflection of the bathing pool or watching a well-formed wave crumble just offshore, one cannot help but speculate upon the rites that may have preceded a famous contest or followed a long run of exhilarating surf. It is easy enough to imagine the rows of polished koa boards and the chanters who accompanied the supple ali'i who must have gathered there.*

In religion, in language, in festivals, in love, and in song and story, surfing was woven into the life of ancient Hawai'i. Its related activities overlapped one another in the complexities and contradictions of the old social order: a surfer might sweat for weeks shaping and shining a new board to perfection, then avoid work of any kind for days on end as he joined his fellow villagers in the mounting surf. He might dedicate his alaia to the gods and then gamble his life away in the riding of it. With chants, contests, ten dozen places to surf, and literally thousands of hand-carved boards to ride upon, surfing was truly the sport of commoners as well as chiefs—a vital part of the isolated island world European voyagers chanced upon in 1778.

* In the late 1970s Ku'emanu Heiau was rescued from developers and turned into a protected monument.



G IN KAILUA ON THE ISLAND OF HAWAI'I.
LULU.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Touch Of Civilization

The palaces of kings are built upon the ruins of the bowers of paradise.

—THOMAS PAINE

From the peak in its development, surfing suddenly and very rapidly began to decline. During the nineteenth century the sport almost completely disappeared, and by 1900 a wave, a board, and a surfer were seldom seen together on the foamy edges of Hawai'i's green islands. As early as 1844, in a volume called *Scenes and Scenery in the Sandwich Islands*, one observer noted that surfing was already a rare sight. Ten years later, another observer noted that Lāhainā, Maui, was one of the few places left in the islands where waves were still ridden with any enthusiasm. At Hilo, perhaps one of the last strongholds of surfing on the island of Hawai'i, another writer observed in 1876 that although one could still watch the grand spectacle there, few of the younger generation had learned how to surf and those who had were undistinguished.[1]

As the century wore on, the scenes that William Ellis had witnessed in the 1820s—of whole villages dropping everything to surf and of corpulent, aging chiefs riding the waves with the joy of youths—became just fading memories. More and more waves were rolling in unridden to bury themselves on Hawai'i's beaches. What happened to the thousands and thousands of gleaming surfboards? What caused the Hawaiians to abandon the sport that they alone had developed to such a peak through so many generations? To understand the reasons, we must consider surfing within the framework of Hawaiian culture and society and the damage wrought by the coming of Europeans with their diseases, weapons, consumer goods, institutions, and ideologies.

Surfing's decline was part of the wider disaster visited upon the Hawaiian people. From the arrival of the first Europeans in 1778 to the American takeover of the islands in 1898, virtually all native sports and pastimes declined to the point of disappearance as Hawaiians lost their social, economic, and political independence and their numbers were steadily reduced by disease. This tragedy began with the arrival of the British ships commanded by Capt. James Cook. The isolated Hawaiians, lacking any natural immunity to the infectious diseases carried by the British and the succession of seamen, whalers, and adventurers from many nations who followed, were struck down in great numbers by measles, small pox, and other diseases previously unknown in Hawai'i. Imported venereal diseases then sterilized many of the survivors. By the 1890s, this biological onslaught had reduced the Hawaiian population from the 400,000 estimated by Lieutenant King in 1779 to around 40,000, a drop of 90 percent.* Furthermore, by "discovering" Hawai'i and mapping its location for the Western world, the British opened the islands to a parade of *Haole*—Europeans, Americans, and other foreigners of European extraction—whose activities transformed life in the islands. Sandalwood traders,

* Estimates of the pre-European population of Hawai'i range from as low as 200,000 to as high as 800,000; whatever the figure, the reduction to 40,000 was catastrophic.

BY THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, WHEN THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN, SURFING WAS AT ITS LOWEST EBB. THIS LONE HAWAIIAN SURFER AT WAIKĪKĪ BEACH CARRIES ONE OF THE LAST ALAIA BOARDS TO BE RIDDEN THERE.

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force of U.S. Marines landed from an Americ
overthrew the monarchy, established a republic,
in having Hawai'i annexed by the United State

In this process of radical change, Hawaiian c
under heavy attack, first indirectly and then d
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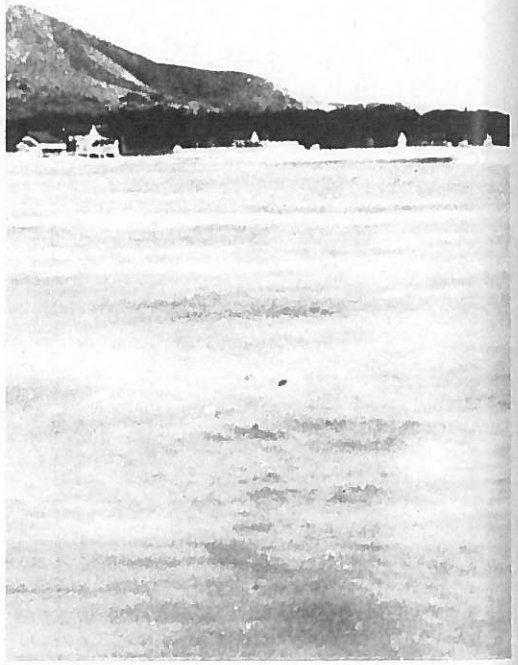

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whalers, and the merchants who took up residence introduced consumer goods and the money economy. Later, American missionaries-turned-businessmen and other capitalists bought up Hawaiian lands to develop a sugar industry; in so doing they imported so many laborers from Asia that by the 1890s the Hawaiians had become a minority in their own land. While this transformation was unfolding, the earnest attempt by Hawaiians to take their place among the community of nations—as an independent kingdom ruled by the Kamehameha dynasty—was being undermined by Haole sugar planters and businessmen who had become Hawaiian citizens and had gained elective or appointive office. When Queen Lili'uokalani attempted to roll back Haole control of the kingdom in 1893, the foreigners staged a revolution. Aided by the intimidating presence of a force of U.S. Marines landed from an American naval vessel, they overthrew the monarchy, established a republic, and in 1898 succeeded in having Hawai'i annexed by the United States.

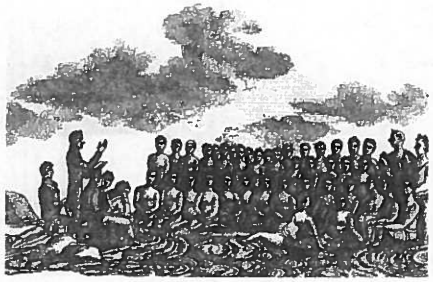
In this process of radical change, Hawaiian culture and values came under heavy attack, first indirectly and then directly. The arrival of foreigners with their ships, guns, and seemingly wondrous goods led Hawaiians to doubt the power of their gods and ultimately themselves. That these foreigners could be so powerful and wealthy without respecting the kapu system, the sacred taboos that had regulated every aspect of island life, led daring Hawaiians to flout specific prohibitions until finally, the king uprooted the entire system. One day in 1819, Liholiho, Kamehameha I's son and successor, sat down to eat with his mother and other high-ranking chiefesses, deliberately breaking the all-important kapu against men and women eating together. This was a public sign that the kapu system was to be abandoned and that people were no longer under the power of the old gods.

Overthrowing the kapu system cut the Hawaiians adrift from the power of their gods and the stability of ritual regulation, disorganizing family and class structure and impacting farming, fishing, and all other aspects of daily life. As far as sport and games were concerned, the most immediate effect of the 1819 revolution was the lapse of the annual Makahiki festival intimately tied to the god Lono. Celebrated fully for the last time just before his overthrow, the Makahiki's lusty stimulus had been of prime importance in keeping sports and games alive and fresh and in maintaining public support. With the end of the festival the great tournaments were never organized again, and Hawaiian sports were never again inspired by the mass enthusiasm of the Makahiki. For surfing, the abolition of the traditional religion signaled the end of its sacred aspects. With surf chants, board construction rites, sports gods, and other sacred elements removed, the once ornate sport of surfing was stripped of much of its cultural plumage.

To complete this denuding, a new religion arrived with a new god and a whole new system of restrictions to replace Hawai'i's decaying worship forms. In 1820, the year following the overthrow of the kapu system, American missionaries from New England landed and set out to convert the Hawaiians. Though initially unsuccessful, within the decade the missionaries had converted key chiefs and chiefesses, and during the 1830s they succeeded in establishing their Calvinistic brand of Christianity as the new religion of the islands.

Basic to their teachings was an abhorrence of pastimes that took people away from work and worship. As early as 1838, a visitor who called on Hawai'i during a round-the-world cruise, noted that:

> A change has taken place in certain customs. . . . I allude to the variety of athletic exercises, such as swimming, with or without a surfboard, dancing, wrestling, throwing the javelin, etc., all of which games, being in opposition to the strict te-



A MISSIONARY PREACHES TO A HAWAIIAN CONGREGATION 1820S. PHOTO COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

nets of Calvinism, have been suppressed. . . . Can the missionaries be fairly charged with suppressing these games? I believe they deny having done so. But they write and publicly express their opinions, and state these sports to be expressly against the laws of God, and by a succession of reasoning, which may readily be traced, impress upon the minds of the chiefs and others, the idea that all who practice them, secure themselves the displeasure of offended heaven. Then the chiefs, for a spontaneous benevolence, at once interrupt customs so hazardous to their vassals."[2]

Defending missionary policy in those early days was Hiram Bingham, who protested that the churchmen were innocent of suppressing Hawaiian pastimes. Concerning surfing he wrote:

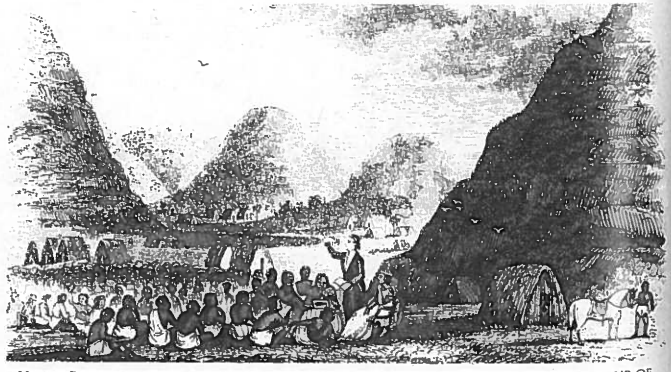
> The decline and discontinuance of the use of the surfboard, as civilization advances, may be accounted for by the increase in modesty, industry and religion, without supposing, as some have affected to believe, that missionaries caused oppressive enactments against it.[3]

By the modesty of a new life he meant the adoption of European clothing, which was not nearly so convenient as a loincloth for swimming and surfing. To illustrate their increase in industry he singled out the time-consuming process of making a new cloth garment or earning money to buy one, and the chief's demands on commoners' labor for purchasing European merchandise. His reference to religion apparently meant that the requirements of the new faith left little time for leisure.

Another aspect of the missionaries' righteous attitude was voiced by Sheldon Dibble when, speaking of "rough" sports such as surfing, he wrote:

> The evils resulting from all these sports and amusement have in part been named. Some lost their lives thereby, some were severely wounded, maimed and crippled; some were reduced to poverty, both by losses in gambling and by neglecting to cultivate the land; and the instances were not few in which they were reduced to utter starvation. But the greatest evil of all resulted from the constant intermingling, without any restraint, of persons of both sexes and of all ages, at all times of the day and at all hours of the night.[4]

Of course, surfing itself did not displease all the missionaries, but they were unanimously united in their opposition to the re-



HIRAM BINGHAM, CHIEF AMERICAN MISSIONARY, PREACHING AT WAIMEA DURING A TOUR OF O'AHU IN 1826. SEATED NEXT TO HIM IS KA'AHUMANU, THE WIDOW OF KAMEHAMEHA I AND AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CONVERT. PHOTO COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

FULLY DRESSED IN EUROPEAN FINERY, MEMBERS OF HAWAIIA

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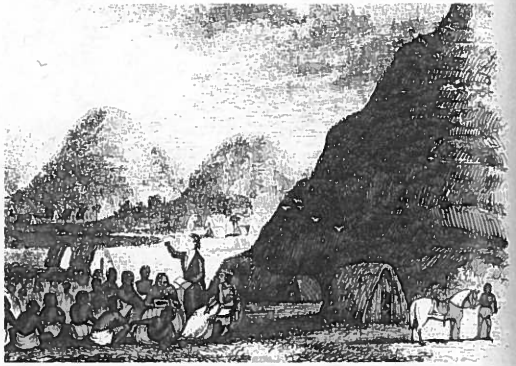

IEF AMERICAN MISSIONARY, PREACHING AT WAIMEA DURING A TOUR OF
) NEXT TO HIM IS KA'AHUMANU, THE WIDOW OF KAMEHAMEHA I AND AN
IAN CONVERT. PHOTO COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

FULLY DRESSED IN EUROPEAN FINERY, MEMBERS OF HAWAIIAN ROYALTY LEAVE CHURCH AFTER SERVICES, MID 1830S. PHOTO COURTESY BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

lated activities such as betting, the "immorality" of surfing together in "scanty costume," sexual freedom among men and women surfers, and whatever religious practices might have remained after the collapse of the old religion.

With these activities forbidden, interest in surfing quickly died. The Hawaiians apparently found little value in the sport when it lacked these attractions. One explanation of the decline admits that, "as the zest of the sport was enhanced by the fact that both sexes engaged in it, when this practice was found to be discountenanced by the new morality, it was felt that the interest in it had largely departed—and this game too went the way of its fellows."[5] The same reaction greeted the prohibition of gambling. The life seemed to go out of surfing and those other sports in which competition and betting had been important. Afterward their practice was dull and unexciting.

In addition to the loss of these flavoring elements, foreigners introduced new recreational activities that interested the Western-conscious Hawaiians and in many cases served as substitutes for their traditional games. For instance, playing cards probably influenced the early disappearance of *kōnane*, a game similar to checkers, and *pūhenehene*, a guessing game in which objects are concealed on a player's body. The introduction of the horse brought about the end of *heihei kūkini*, or foot racing; thereafter horse riding and racing competed with swimming and surfing for Hawaiians' leisure time and energy.

While learning new games the Hawaiians also were preoccupied with understanding and adapting to a new life; this further contributed to the neglect and disappearance of old pastimes. The new learning brought by missionaries was an imposing challenge to the islanders. Curious about the previously unimagined secrets of reading and writing, and encouraged or ordered by their chiefs, many Hawaiians undertook the arduous task of learning the scholarly skills of the West and quickly achieved a literacy rate that surpassed that of the United States. Evidently they rated the new learning above their traditional pleasures, at least sometimes: in one hastily constructed nineteenth-century schoolhouse on Kaua'i, surfboards were used to build writing tables and seats!

Given the onslaught of infectious diseases; the loss of land, livelihood, and sovereignty; the abandonment of an encouraging traditional religion followed by the embrace of a dour alien creed; and then the enticement of new activities; it is a wonder that all traditional Hawaiian sports and pastimes did not disappear. Surfing actually fared better than most, although by the turn of the century it was on its way to extinction, according to some observers.

To see what might have happened in Hawai'i, let us leap for a moment two thousand miles south to Tahiti, where another Polynesian community suffered a similar encounter with the outside world. As we have seen, of all the places where surfing was enjoyed in the Pacific, Tahiti ranked second only to Hawai'i in the sport's development. Men and women as well as children enjoyed it, and the more expert riders could stand on their boards. When one of the authors visited Tahiti with his surfboard in the mid 1950s, all that remained of Tahitian surfing was an occasional youngster skimming through small waves on a bodyboard. Not one true surfboard was to be seen on the waves that break around this fabled south sea island. The changes wrought by Western intrusion had virtually eliminated this once popular recreation. Attempts to interest Tahitians by demonstrating how to ride the beach breaks and the curling waves at the reef passes were unsuccessful. They were not interested anymore. It was a children's pastime, they said, not worth the time and effort to learn.

As long ago as 1891 surfing in Tahiti had apparently already disappeared. In that year the American historian Henry Adams observed:

> As for the Tahitians that have come within my
> . . . they have been the most commonplace, dr
> people I have yet seen. If they have amusemen
> they conceal them. Neither dance nor game I
> heard of; nor surfing, swimming, nor ball-pla
> thing but the stupid, mechanical himene [hym

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later, in 1892, Nathaniel Emerson wrote this of Ha

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> for a time it seemed as if it had the vitality o
> national pastime. There are those living . . . w
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/ear the American historian Henry Adams observed:

> As for the Tahitians that have come within my acquaintance . . . they have been the most commonplace, dreary, spiritless people I have yet seen. If they have amusements or pleasures, they conceal them. Neither dance nor game have I seen or heard of; nor surfing, swimming, nor ball-playing nor anything but the stupid, mechanical himene [hymn singing].[6]

In those days Hawaiian surfing was little better off. Just a year later, in 1892, Nathaniel Emerson wrote this of Hawai'i:

> The sport of surf-riding possessed a grand fascination, and for a time it seemed as if it had the vitality of its own as a national pastime. There are those living . . . who remember the time when almost the entire population of a village would at certain hours resort to the sea-side to indulge in, or to witness, this magnificent accomplishment. We cannot but mourn its decline. But this too has felt the touch of civilization, and today it is hard to find a surfboard outside of our museums and private collections.[7]

The museum would indeed have been an incongruous end for what was once such a vigorous and spectacular sport. Fortunately, although surfing wasted away during the nineteenth century, it did not die. He'e nalu, in fact, fared best of all the traditional Hawaiian sports and games. Most of the others quickly disappeared early in the period of foreign contact. Surfing's flame died down, but a combination of circumstances preserved in Hawai'i the Polynesian pastime that disappeared in such other early cultural centers as Tahiti and Aotearoa. From somewhere, a spark remained to smolder through the dark century of Hawai'i's transformation. Nearly one hundred years after the abandonment of the kapu system—when what little that remained of the old world was almost unrecognizable—new, fresh elements in a changed Hawai'i fanned the spark and brought surfing back to life.