



Merewether National Surfing Reserve



Merewether Beach Newcastle Australia

Painted by John Earle



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Photo Bosko



Merewether National Surfing Reserve



Photo Bosko

Foreword by National Surfing Reserves chairman and founder Brad Farmer

The majestic coastline of Newcastle is one of the finest jewels in the crown of the wave-lashed coast of this island nation. Merewether Beach may be only one of Australia's ten thousand surfing breaks, but it ranks among the most loved, revered, and iconic of all on our shining blue ocean coasts. Indeed, according to the salt-encrusted Novocastrian surfing crew, Merewether is Australia's undisputed 'Crown Jewel'.

Few coastal communities enjoy the full gamut of intrinsic qualities, which make it supremely worthy to be chosen and dedicated as Australia's seventh National Surfing Reserve. Merewether Beach meets the criteria on all counts: an enormous strength of surfing heritage and culture, a unique and rare shoreline configuration, extraordinary environmental quality, a proud and dedicated local community, and naturally, one of the world's favourite wave sites. Indeed, Merewether has been a seedbed for surfers from all walks of life, from the ordinary to the most extraordinary – including four-time world champion, the noble Novocastrian, Mark 'MR' Richards.

National Surfing Reserves aims to enhance the value and integrity of our precious environmental and recreational coastal resources, enshrining them in recognition of their supreme value as natural

gifts to past, present and future generations.

The Merewether National Surfing Reserve Committee – so ably led by Tim Ryan – has been truly outstanding in its efforts towards this historic declaration. So, too, has the National Reference Group, particularly Emeritus Professor Andrew Short, whose world-renowned expertise has been invaluable. Our gratitude also to NSR Patron, Minister Peter Garrett AM, Mark Richards OAM, the ASP's Wayne 'Rabbit' Bartholomew AM, Graham Harding, Chris Tola, the NSW Government and the Minister for Lands and Local Government, the Hon. Tony Kelly, and Premier Nathan Rees, who was an inaugural member of the National Surfing Reserves Committee in 2005.

Share, respect, and preserve this great national jewel as she so richly deserves. Trillions of waves have graced Merewether ... let them roll on!

BRAD FARMER
Founder NSR and Surfrider Foundation Australia

Merewether National Surfing Reserve Committee

Dave Anderson, Dr Geoff Booth, Kim Brent, Roger Clements, Mick Eggleston, Brad Farmer, Glenn Crompton, Adrian Harte, Graham Harding, Neil Jameson, Ian McNicol, Mark Richards, Brett Phillips, Chris Tola, Tim Ryan, Warren Smith, Peter Thomson, Chris Totterman, Susan Tracey.

This booklet and indeed the process of declaring Merewether National Surfing Reserve would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of the MNSR Committee and the assistance of the Department of Lands.

In this publication we have attempted a snapshot of surfing at Merewether rather than a definitive history. That history begs to be written; we could then include the hundreds more surfers whose stories and images could grace the pages of a more complete work.

Three people deserve particular acknowledgement for their efforts in the production of this booklet. Mick Eggleston designed the MNSR logo of Merewether's iconic pump house and waves. Neil Jameson had the toughest job of writing this booklet which he tackled with enthusiasm and passion, combining the various and often conflicting histories of Merewether. Finally, Chris Totterman went far and beyond what could be considered reasonable for a volunteer on a community project such as this. The book's design speaks of both Chris's remarkable talent and his dedication to the project.

One last word of thanks to all our contributing photographers who combed their archives to provide us with the exceptional images of Merewether and its surfers.

The committee trust that by declaring Merewether a National Surfing Reserve we are able to protect the reefs, the banks and the waves of Merewether for generations to come.

TIM RYAN
Chairman of the Merewether National Surfing Reserve Committee



Any time

Any tide

Any swell

Any wind

Any size

The Awabakal nation

Just south of the Hunter River (which separates the Worimi nation to the north and the Awabakal nation to the south) lies the Merewether coast.

A water-based Aboriginal nation, the Awabakal are the traditional custodians of Awabakal country and hence Merewether.

The Sea Eagle is the Awabakal totem, a story linking sky, land and sea.

Merewether's present coastal form was established about 3-4000 years ago after the sea-level rose at the end of the last Ice-Age. The Awabakal had established campsites probably tens of thousands of years before this event and continued living on the coast for thousands of years after.

These and other changes added further mythical, symbolic, and physical sustenance to the significance of the beach as a special part of Awabakal culture.

The Merewether area remains rich in Awabakal history and meaning, and is still in use today for traditional Awabakal resources and teachings.

Merewether chert was an important resource of stone material highly prized by the Awabakal people who traded this resource with many other nation groups. Revealing ancient Aboriginal linkages with other coastal places, Merewether chert was located at Narrabeen Beach (also a now-famous surfing place) in the 1930s.

Local Merewether Beach ochre was also an important Awabakal nation resource. It is still used today for colouring seasonal grasses. Food stuffs important to the Awabakal, including fish, molluscs, a

variety of berries and fruits were once in abundance in the Merewether area. Both Men's and Women's Business were taught in this area.

An Aboriginal surfing culture commenced in Australia (Wreck Bay, Jervis Bay) in the 1970s. It has grown steadily ever since and now has an established place within Australian Aboriginal nations, especially coastal clans and mobs. Although the Aboriginal surfing movement had its first Australian contest at Wreck Bay in 1993, Surfest (Newcastle and Merewether) has a proud history of involvement with Aboriginal surfers.

To demonstrate a clear example of the connection between the Awabakal nation and waves consider these comments from the 2002 Newcastle Surfest:

"Indigenous Ceremony Turns On Perfect Waves.

Prior to the start of competition in the Billabong Indigenous Classic at Newcastle Beach, local Awabakal dancers and elders presented the traditional welcoming ceremony to the gathered crowd of competitors and spectators.

After days of on-shore wind and rain, for the remainder of this event, competitors were treated to perfect 1m-1.2m waves, with light offshore winds.

'For day one of the competition it was almost too good to be true,' Surfest's spokesperson David Cromarty said'."

In 2008, Surfest moved its contest site from Newcastle to Merewether Beach and on Wednesday, March 26, a "Welcome to Country" ceremony was performed by Awabakal dancers and elders. Once again the surf was at its best for the Indigenous Classic.



Painted by then Newcastle-based colonial artist Joseph Lycett, this work depicting Aborigines spearing fish, others diving for crayfish, a party seated beside a fire cooking fish. A scene which could be Merewether. 2962715. National Library of Australia.

Convicts and coal

*M*erewether's colonial history reflects that of Newcastle itself: a tale of convicts and coal.

On March 30, 1791, escaped convicts William and Mary Bryant camped just south of Merewether, discovering coal, food and friendly Aborigines.

From 1804, the most intractable convicts from the new colony were sent north to mine the coal deposits that outcropped near the mouth of what is now known as the Hunter River.

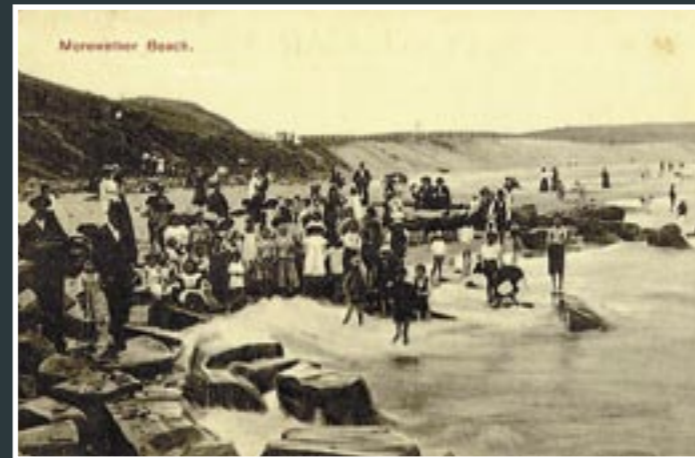
In 1835 Dr James Mitchell purchased the first parcel of land for what would become the 757-hectare Burwood Estate covering the present day Merewether. It included vast tracts of shifting sand dunes sparsely covered with coarse grasses.

Mitchell, an entrepreneurial former army surgeon, formed a company to manage mining and smelting operations on the Burwood Estate. Tunnels bored through the headland provided a rail link from the smelter works and neighbouring collieries at Burwood Beach. Steam trains hauled coal from Glenrock through the sand drifts to The Junction.

The locale was to draw its name not from Mitchell but his son-in-law. Edward Christopher Merewether who had accepted the position of General Superintendent of the Australian Agricultural Company, based in Newcastle, married Augusta Maria Mitchell (jnr) and built a landmark home known as The Ridge. Today, its upper storey still commands imposing ocean views.

Mining, smelting and pottery activities soon gave rise to a township. Initially wary of the waves, the locals did enjoy a cooling paddle in the surf. By the 1870s segregated areas were established with men swimming south of the headland at a place known as The Gulf while women and children bathed at a more sheltered spot known as The Ladies where the kids clambered on a distinctive outcrop they called Sailor's Rock.

Picnickers choosing the wrong day for a trip to Burwood beat a hasty retreat at the sight of nude male swimmers.



Merewether Beach. 93-171. Newcastle Region Library.



The Beach, Merewether. Broadhurst Post Card, State Library of NSW

Sharks and surfing pioneers

*T*he shark again rushed, and catching Nolan by the left arm dragged him under the water.”

The public outcry in the wake of the The Newcastle Morning Herald’s dramatic account of a shark attack off Merewether Beach on the morning of October 13, 1907 led to the formation of Merewether Surf Lifesaving Club.

Edward Nolan, 26, took a swim off The Ladies. About 50 metres from the beach “he was horrified to see between him and the shore, close upon him, a large shark”. Nolan fought off the first attack but the shark returned to grab him by the arm. With “flesh and sinews badly lacerated” he managed to wrench free and make it to the line of breakers where he was rescued.

The event came as a shock to the local community and a public meeting was held at Merewether Council Chambers to discuss a petition to the State Government to provide a safe bathing place, change sheds and lifesaving apparatus.



Clubhouse 1923

A further public meeting was held on December 16, 1907 at McCloskey’s Hall to determine a course of action. The election of a working committee at that meeting marked the creation of Merewether Amateur Swimming Club (later to become the Surf Lifesaving Club). The following March, the new club promoted the Hunter’s first-ever surf carnival. Proceedings were interrupted when club members, one wearing the belt, swam to the rescue of a young man caught in a rip.

Over the ensuing years the humanitarian and sporting phenomenon known as surf lifesaving would transform the Merewether beachfront. From a rudimentary shed built in 1909, the fledgling body was to open its first clubhouse in 1923. The 1930s brought the greatest change to the built environment when work began on the present-day Merewether Baths and a pavilion, later to become known as Surf House.

But creation of facilities was no guarantee against sharks and other perils. Edward Pritchard, 17, survived an attack in 1927. In 1951, Australian surf ski champion Frank Okulich, 21, was swimming out beyond Sailor’s Rock with mates when taken by a shark. His body was recovered an hour later.

The random appearance of sharks did not deter Merewether’s competitive lifesavers. Stan Barratt was a star of the 1930s, winning numerous district titles and the club’s first aquatic medal at a national championship when he placed second in the senior belt race. He was



First Clubhouse 1909



March Past Team 1929

Sharks and surfing pioneers

one of the club stars, along with Jim Tracey, Jack Weibe and Jeff Lawson, who would hold body surfing competitions at the Ladies break.

It was an era when Merewether became known on the national scene for the precision of its all-conquering march past teams.

The post-war period saw the emergence of Merewether as a swimming power. In 1947, the junior surf team won the Northern Districts, NSW and Australian titles - Merewether's first national gold medal.

In 1950 Laurie March, Wagga Brien, Bill Jones and Bill Webster won the branch, state and Australian junior teams titles. At the branch and state events, they filled the first four places, and in the nationals finished 1-3-4-5. In 1951, March and John Reeves become the club's first state representatives.

In 1958, Robert "Oogie" Richards won the club's first individual Australian championship in the junior surf race at Scarborough, Western Australia.

The outstanding performer in the club's competitive history was a pool swimmer who broke the Australian 400-metres record in trials for the Mexico Olympics but missed selection. Instead, Scott Derwin is best remembered for an incredible association with Merewether when he represented the state and Australia, won junior and senior surf and belt titles and led successful club surf teams. In 1967, he became the only 17-

year-old to win the Australian senior surf championship.

When Merewether members were not performing surf patrols they were often battling the elements in emergency situations. Huge seas in 1943 damaged the clubhouse with the first floor having to be demolished. Merewether boat crews assisted in the Maitland floods of 1949 and 1955.

The Australian titles held at Merewether in 1960 were unforgettable. A huge surf tempted officials to postpone the carnival but it went ahead under the gaze of awe-struck spectators who watched the heroics and carnage - particularly in the boat events - unfold. Merewether's boat, launched just six months before at a cost of 650 pounds, was completely wrecked.

During the "Sygna" storm of May 1974 huge seas and gale-force winds stripped every grain of sand from Merewether leaving a precipitous rocky shoreline that would take seasons to recover.

For three-quarters of a century the club had remained an all-male domain, a situation that changed in 1983 with the admission of its first female lifesavers. In 1985, Natalie Ebrill became the first female club captain.

In 2007-2008 Merewether Surf Lifesaving Club celebrated a century of continuous service. With a thriving Nippers membership and an active senior committee, it remains an integral part of the local community.



NSW Surf Life Saving Championships 1963-1964. 1st place Merewether SLSC



Paul Kirwin with whale at Merewether, September 2001

Photo Peter Stoop/The Newcastle Herald



100 years of surf life saving at Merewether by Tony Robinson

The surfing revolution



Australian Titles at Merewether Beach 1960



John Armstrong, Laurie March & Spiro Catsicas 1953



Jim Newburn by John Nute



Robbie Wood by John Nute



The Beachniks



Ross Bailey and body surfers by John Nute

History relates that modern surfing started in Australia when Duke Paoa Kahanamoku stood up on a hand-made board at Freshwater Beach in Sydney in the summer of 1914-15. As surf club historian Laurie March recalls, the first surfboard did not arrive at Merewether until 1945. It was "12 feet long, 14 inches wide and 3 and half inches deep, cigar shaped, tried by many but mastered by none".

In 1950 John Keysell acquired a 16-foot hollow board, built by Gordon Woods of Sydney. March, a joiner by trade, built six copies. In 1952, they were the first long surfboards to surf the big waves of Merewether's Third Reef. By 1956, as many as 20 were stored in the ski shed on the lower promenade.

Surfing's great cultural shift coincided with the teen revolution of the 1950s and 60s. With its appetite for freedom the new surfing



Robbie Wood

generation was distinctively different from the established beach culture. Beach inspectors and volunteer lifesavers did not necessarily welcome the board-riding boom, particularly when surfers trespassed into the flags area. The new board-riding culture rejected the establishment represented by the "clubbies", especially the power to impound surfboards. In this period of diverging cultures, there were surfers

whose loyalties straddled both camps. Foremost among them was a young lifesaver and later legendary Merewether board-rider. The name Robbie Wood would be part of the histories of these two Merewether tribes. In time, the two surf factions would reconcile and ultimately collaborate in the establishment of Merewether as a National Surfing Reserve.



M-bay lineup by Dave Kelly

Merewether – the next wave

No matter how many great surfers call Merewether home, the enduring star of this legendary locale is the wave itself.

The craggy old headland bears too many scars inflicted since European settlement to be regarded as a classic natural beauty, and concrete and buildings have reshaped the backdrop of beach and sand hills until it bears only passing resemblance to the place once known only to the Awabakal community.

But the process of waves breaking on the shoreline has remained constant.

As generations of surfers came to recognise, Merewether's unique combination of rock shelves and reefs deemed it could be surfed at any time, on any tide, in any swell, wind or size. Whether it be the shallow cylinders of The Rocks or four-metre

monsters peeling off Third Reef, Merewether became a magnet for surfers looking to test themselves on a performance wave against the best of the locals raised in the unpretentious urban streets beyond the beachfront.

Among a handful of surfers riding an odd collection of hollow and solid boards and hanging around breaks like Poggo's and Merewether Rocks during the late 1950s were Robbie Wood, Phil Woodcock and Jim Newburn.

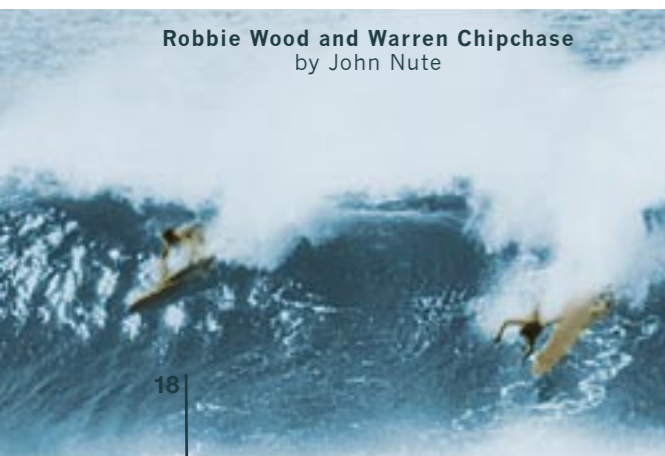
Newburn was the first to show that the rock shelf waves were something beyond a mere test of surfing survival. He demonstrated that Merewether could be a performance arena where surfers with the right blend of nerves and skill could carve as well as glide and nose-ride. He had a willing companion in the talented Wood.



Peter Cornish by John Nute



Club flag by Greg Gray



Robbie Wood and Warren Chipchase
by John Nute



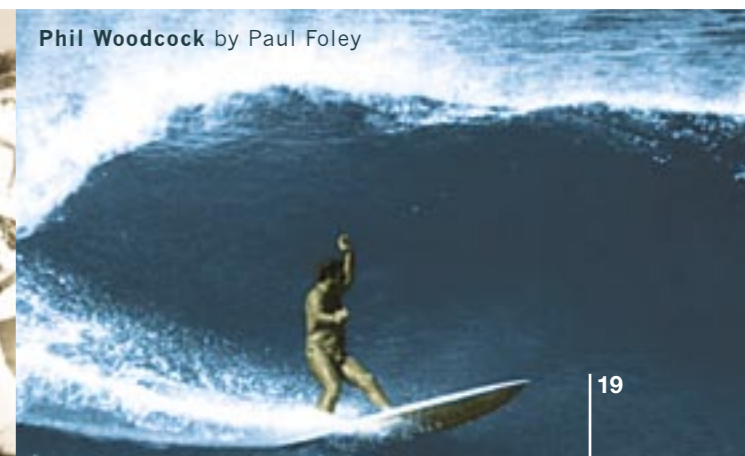
Peter Thomson



Merewether Baths
by Ray Richards



Club competition 1966



Phil Woodcock by Paul Foley

When hollow boards were replaced by balsa and eventually polyurethane and fibre-glass, Newburn and Wood would step into the 1960s among the very best of Australia's board-riding pioneers.

Surfing's liberating qualities meant the majority of surfers never felt the call of club and were happy to free surf in perfect anonymity. Consequently, a host of brilliant surfers has danced across the Merewether screen without an entry in the official record. Along with those who stood on paddleboards, longboards, malibus, single fins, twins and thrusters over the years have been others who rode skis, mats, surfos, kneeboards, and boogieboards.

Yet, the history of the place is defined by the exploits of those who graduated from the ultra-competitive local ranks to establish Merewether Surfboard Club as one of the proudest surfing communities in the world.

Performance peaks would come and go but 1987 is the best so far. In October, the team of Mark Richards, Matt Hoy, Luke Egan, Nick Wood (MR's godson) and Simon Law won the the Quiksilver Surf League, the ultimate prize for Australian team surfing. Richards, in his last competitive outing for the club, was already a four-times world champion. Nick Wood, son of Merewether pioneer Robbie Wood, was a surfing prodigy. In 1987, at 16, he ripped the Bells Beach Classic apart to become the youngest surfer to win a world tour event. The following year he was crowned Australian Surfer of the Year.

Luke Egan, the son of legendary shaper Sam Egan, was on his way to the top drawer of international surfing as arguably the greatest never to win the world title. Matt Hoy, son of club stalwart Brian Hoy, would accompany Simon Law on the brilliant list of Merewether members to grace the world

Tim Lawrie by Dave Kelly



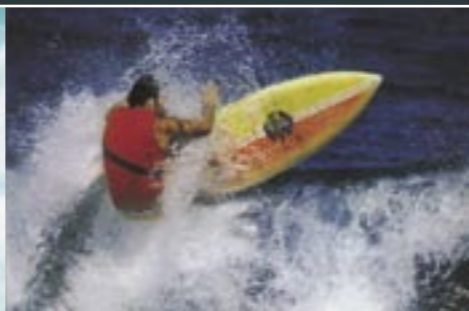
Rocks May 1974 by Kim Brent



Dennis Bridges by Mark Sutton



Kim/Noel Brent by Dennis Kinder



Roger Clements by Hugh McLeod



Paul Carroll by Paul Foley



Mick Adam, Richard Kelly, Stuart Hughes and Jesse Adam by Tim Ryan



Fancy dress comp 1984 by Brian Green



Glenn Benton by Dave Anderson

championship tour. The club went on to win an unprecedented four consecutive Quiksilver titles (1987-1990), with the core ably assisted by Shane Powell, Marcus Brabant, Craig McMillan, Stuart Hughes and Dave McArthur. The team was coached variously by Robbie Wood and Mark Richards.

In 1964, the club's foundation year, Wood had finished second to Newburn in the very first competition. Third in the open division was a lithe goofy-footer called Peter Cornish, who was also Wood's brother-in-law.

It was the emerging generation led by Cornish, Bob Lynch and Peter Thomson who established Merewether as the dominant force in the Newcastle Surfboard Association's annual team titles of the 1960s. Cornish was a stand-out. Runner-up to Wayne Lynch for the 1968 Australian team for the world championships he was omitted on the basis that a goofy-footer would have been unsuited to the rights of Bells Beach. Ironically, Rolf Aurness, a Californian goofy, won the event. In the one-off "Merewether 1000" of 1971 Cornish beat

reigning Australian champion Paul Neilsen, national junior champ Simon Anderson as well as Michael Peterson and Peter Townend.

Roger Clements, with his radical style and vivid boards, was almost a force of nature heading into the mid-1970s. Watching his every move was a long-limbed kid called Mark Richards who by 1973 had won his third club junior crown. Richards would never collect a club senior championship - he was too busy winning world titles.

The sheer depth of wave-riding ability at Merewether generated epic battles for the club's annual prizes and highlighted the class of Dennis Bridges, Stewart Clarke and Paul "Corky" Carroll. Following them in 1981 was Martin McMillan, a club junior and under-17 NSW Schoolboys champion. McMillan would later become 1991 World Longboard Champion.

By the time Mick Adam won his third club senior title, Nick Wood had already collected six cadet titles. In 1985 Wood swept the pool winning the cadet, junior and senior titles.

championships rate him as the most prolific trophy-winner in the club's history.

In 1988, Merewether Surfboard Club celebrated its 25th year with the publication of a club history and an anniversary ball attended by more than 500 at Newcastle City Hall. In a one-off event at Surfest that year, a club team took on and beat a "rest of the world" team that included three world champions.

Chad Edser, Merewether's cadet champ of 1988, landed in Lacanau, France in 1992 to win the world junior crown. Mitchell Ross, Travis Lynch, Rhys Smith, Jackson Brent and the next generation of Merewether's best including Jesse Adam, Wes Bainbridge, Craig and Philippa Anderson, Ryan Callinan and Jackson Baker continue the competitive tradition.

In 2006, organisers of Newcastle Surfest announced that the competition would be moving from Newcastle Beach to Merewether, in order to capitalise on its superior surfing conditions. As ever, the wave remained Merewether's most enduring performer.



Jesse Adam by Bosko



Craig McMillan by Dave Kelly



Jackson Brent by Bosko



One of the Bentons by Dave Anderson



Travis Lynch by Bosko



Glen Turner by Dave Anderson



Phillipa Anderson by Dave Anderson



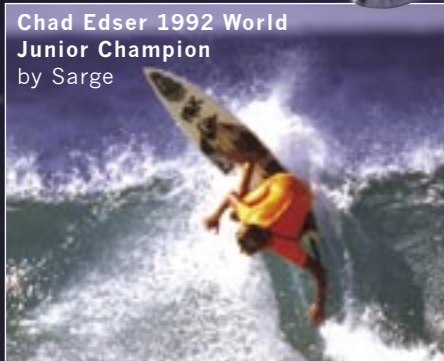
Grommets by Dave Anderson

World class surfers

Martin McMillan 1991 World Longboard Champion
by Dave Anderson



Chad Edser 1992 World Junior Champion
by Sarge



Simon Law World Number 19 1993
by Bosko



Nick Wood Bells Champion 1987
by Bosko



Matt Hoy World Number 5 1997
by Jonathan Carroll/The Newcastle Herald



Luke Egan World Number 2 2000
by Darren Pateman/The Newcastle Herald

Mark Richards

Mark Richards graduated from the Merewether surfing incubator to win four successive world titles. From 1979 to 1982 he was the best competitive surfer on the planet.

His introduction came in the gentle waves of Blacksmiths but it was his loose-limbed mastery of Merewether that earned him "the wounded seagull" nickname and a conviction to take on the world.

Born in 1957, he was raised in a flat above the Hunter St West car business where his parents, Ray and Val, had made room on the showroom floor for the new fibreglass-coated boards.

In his late teens he was a regular in Hawaii, experimenting with twin fins and adopting the famous MR logo modelled on the Superman badge.

In 1979, suspecting that his career lay in shaping surfboards rather than

competitive surfing, he missed vital rounds of the world tour but took the final event to win the first of his four crowns. In Hawaii, surfing's spiritual home, he was revered as much for his humility as his surfing.

When his competitive days were done, MR built his family home with a perfect view of Merewether Point, continued to run the surf shop founded by his father, shapes more than half the boards ridden at Merewether and serve as Merewether National Surfing Reserve patron and committee member.



Mick Adam goes right and MR goes left while Ray Richards looks on. Photo Mark Sutton

At home Inside by Dave Kelly

Telethon day June 13, 1981 by Mark Sutton

Off the top by Mark Sutton



Merewether the waves and the reefs

At the dawn of the Surfin' 60s, two distinctly different groups of boardriders marked their territory by erecting beach shacks near the respective stormwater pipes.

The Little Pipeliners were a bunch of adolescents whose shack stood near the long-gone smaller outfall near Coane Street. The Big Pipeliners were an older crew, some of them part of a former group known as The Beachniks, who erected a shack near the large pipe just north of the Merewether flags area.

The groups surfed the nearest breaks with the Little Pipeliners favouring a break adjacent to the John Parade property once the home of the Pogonoski family of Newcastle printing fame.

Typically, Poggo's is a small left-hand break that can, on the outside bank, with the right wind and tide, be as good a tube as you will find anywhere. It works best in a north-east swell when it can be surfed from half a metre to four metres.

The Centre is the locale for Merewether's goofy-footers. Never quite the same quality as the nearby Rocks it is nonetheless rideable on almost any

swell. This bank can offer both lefts and rights and, because of its proximity to the flags area, has caused much grief for surf club patrols and lifeguards over the years.

On rare days out the back of The Centre, a large east or south swell can deliver waves reminiscent of Kirra at its best. On one memorable day in the early 2000s the damage toll was 15 snapped boards as The Centre invited tube riders to take on its ruthless barrels. This right-hander seems to work at its best when the north-running flow from the nearby rock shelf has shaped the sand bank.

Compared with today, only the bravest of the pioneering boardriders ventured south of The Centre. The essential reason was that, in those pre-leg rope days of the longboard, losing a board on a wave usually meant a frantic swim followed by an afternoon of ding repair.

Over time, this unique combination of rock formations and shelves has been justly recognised as the critical element in Merewether's reputation for producing quality waves.

The Rocks is the wave that best defines Merewether. Revered for its

The Bombie by Dave Anderson

consistency, this right-hander will work in south and east swells and can even be at its best with a bit of north in the wave direction. It has never been better in living memory than in the aftermath of the Sygna storm of May 1974. With a huge swell and the rock shelf exposed all the way to the promenade, The Rocks was sensational - at least for those game enough to step off onto bare rock at the end of each ride. It was no mere coincidence that leg ropes became popular at Merewether after that storm.

Best at 1-1.5 metres on a mid to low tide and primarily when the rock shelf is totally devoid of sand, The Rocks is Merewether at its most competitive. Despite its reputation, at half a metre or so it is a perfect introduction for kids to learn what it is like to paddle into a consistent wave and ride 30 metres or so into the shorebreak.

Until the advent of the short board, few people can remember anyone surfing Inside Ladies. Breaking in shallow water it offers a perfect little right-hand barrel and a fun left and can be surfed in anything other than a straight north-east swell.

Outside Ladies is a different proposition. Merewether Surf Lifesaving

Club veterans recall, before the surfboard boom, venturing out there with the city's best body surfers to slide down the face of perfect rights. Later, they tackled it on surf skis and boards. Back then, it was their playground. In the era of the short board, this domain of looming right-handers has delivered many of Merewether's most epic moments.

In an east or south-east swell, Second Reef often links to The Rocks offering a combination of clean wave face, critical sections and the prospect of a backdoor tube ride.

The Bombie is home to an eclectic crew. It's here you'll find soul surfers, wave mystics and anyone dancing to a different drum. This right-hander works in most swells. It may be soulful, but it is no less competitive than its neighbouring breaks.

Third Reef will start breaking at 2 metres and handle anything up to 4.5 metres, or 15-foot in surfing parlance. Often breaking more than 300-metres off the beach, even on the biggest days, there is always somebody willing to take on the massive challenge of getting out through the break to ride the big right. Some will jump off near the Pumphouse at the northern end of

Poggo's Tim Ryan by Bosko



Centre Ryan Callinan by Bosko



The Rocks Mitchell Ross by Bosko



Ladies Jake Sylvester by Rod Owen



Second Reef Richard Kelly by Paul Foley



Third Reef Geoff Nicholson



the Baths where it is safer but still critical if you mistime the break. Others will try near the blocks at the southern end of the Baths. If you're timing is good, you make it. If not, you can get washed back into the baths or worse still, encounter the near-death experience of being hung up on the rock shelf. On a heavy day you might duck-dive 20 or more waves to make it out the back. Alternatively, surfers have been known to jump off Dudley Bluff and paddle three kilometres north to ride Third Reef. Whatever the route, paddling out at Third Reef in big surf is a test of courage and endurance and certainly adds to its mystique. At its biggest, just getting out is an achievement in itself and makes for a very select crew who then face the prospect of rogue clean-up sets. But the rewards justify the effort: On its absolute best days, Third Reef can deliver a surfer all the way to The Centre and beyond. Although

not the biggest, the most outstanding of all days in recent memory was the legendary "Telethon" day of June 13, 1981.

South of the Baths, in an area known as the Gulf during the 1800s, is Racetrack. It is a grommets' retreat that picks up a bit more north-east swell and can only be surfed to a metre or so. At best it is a challenging little right-hand tube and short left-hander.

Immediately south of Racetrack is Point X at Burwood Beach. Compared to the classic Merewether breaks it is not a great wave but it and the racetrack have become a rite of passage for young grommets making that first venture away from their home break. From 1989, when the infamous sewage outfall known as "the poo pipe" was moved from the beach to some distance out to sea, it became a decidedly more pleasant place to surf.



The Merewether National Surfing reserve; (NSW Department of Lands, SKM).



Illustration by Mike Eggleston 1988

It is this collection of waves, from Poggo's in the north to Point X in the south, that embraces the Merewether surfing experience. At its focal point is Nature's gift of a series of rock shelves delivering consistently challenging waves in a variety of conditions. It is a place to be treasured and protected.

The abutting land mass, with its built environment, will continue to change, but unless Nature deems otherwise, the unique place where land meets sea will remain a venerated surfing locale for as long as waves continue to break on our shores.

Merewether National Surfing Reserve

