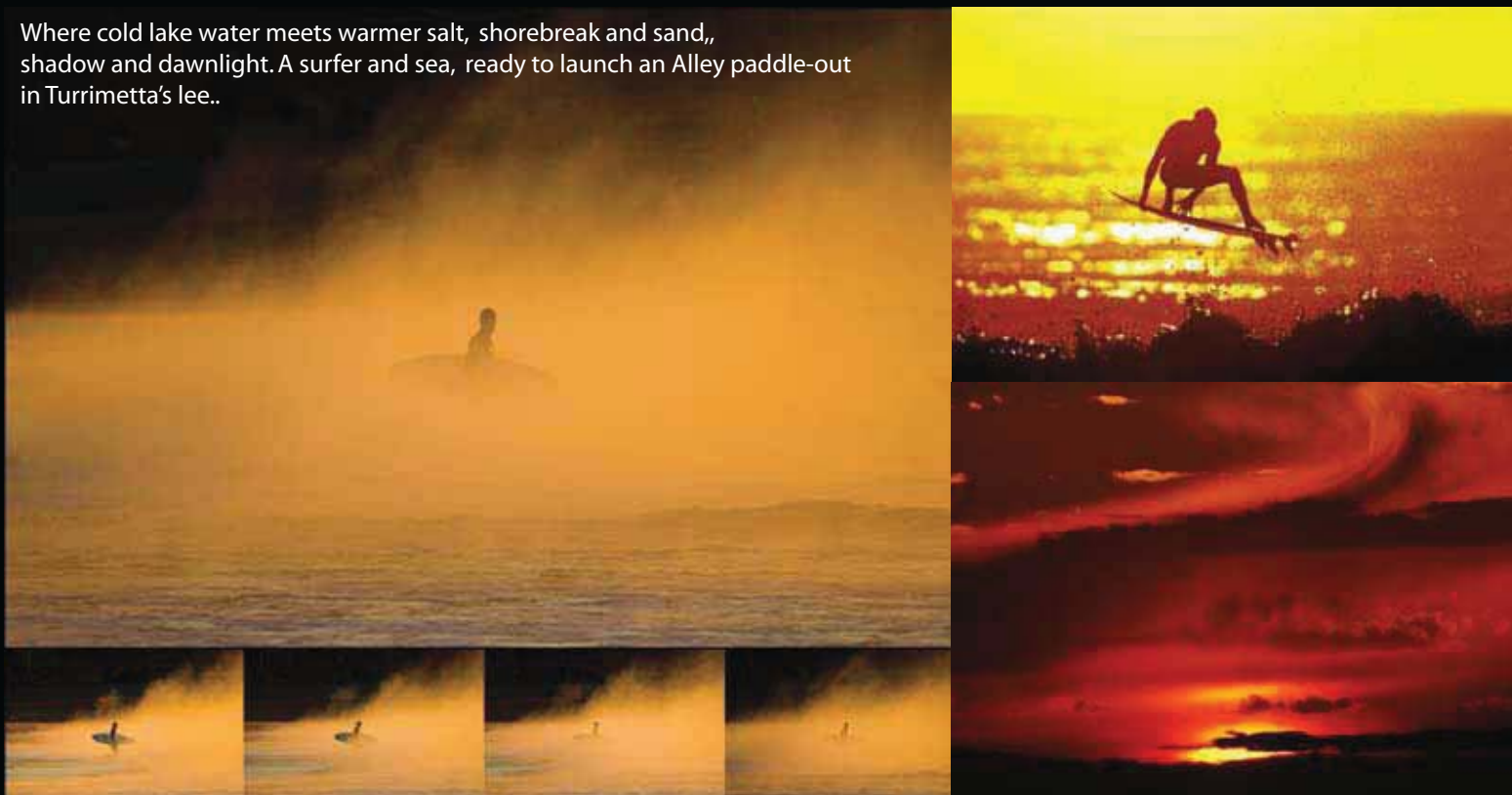


Where cold lake water meets warmer salt, shorebreak and sand,, shadow and dawnlight. A surfer and sea, ready to launch an Alley paddle-out in Turrimetta's lee..



Nathan Hedge: off the lip cutback born of a long line of champion goofy footers..... Col Smith, Dooma Hardman, and matched by Matty Cattle, Matty Grainger, Joel..... the Tookster.



Dawn sessions: a mix of the committed and constrained. Training, tearing before the onshore, the tide, the crowd.

John Deassix surfs before the sun and uses it's rise as his signal to leave. Then follow loose knitted brotherhoods of 'before workers', and 'before day-off'ers.....

THE UNDERBELLY OF THE NORTHERN BEACHES

A NARRABEEN PICTORIAL

Intro by Terry Fitzgerald // Exert by Andrew Kidman // Photos by Mark Onorati

Aboriginal middens are scattered in the lee of the headlands. The lake provided shellfish and easy fishing at its mouth, the marshes – birdlife and marsupial tucker. Folklore has it that a young native girl swam the lake neck to save white settlers from a cabin fire. In her honour the area is named Narrabeen.

I thought of looking up the Oxford for a dry definition of community (how passé) when in fact it's not 'community' that this is about. Months have passed as I've been getting thoughts and words together for this pictorial. But it was Derek Hynd's phone call last night that fired me up. Well, five words of DH's actually: "the underbelly of the northern beaches..."

The Northern Beaches were once a single community stretching from Manly to Palm Beach. The focal point since the '60s for a surfing fraternity spread over more than 30 beaches, reefs and points that, at any given time in those formative years had more magazines, filmmakers, photographers, shapers, factories, pro surfers and surf journalists than any 30km stretch on the planet - including the North Shore of Oahu.

This concentration of embryonic modern surfing included more than 20 surfboard factories centred on Brookvale. Media included magazines Tracks and Surfing World, moviemakers Albert Falzon,

the Sheppard brothers, the Witzigs, Jack McCoy and photographers McCleod, Channon, Crawford, and Pithers. There's also today's plethora of World Champions (seven, I think), contests like the Coke and the HB/O&E Pro-Junior and clubs Narrabeen, Dee Why, Manly Pacific, Newport Plus, and QBC. Finally, the writers (or editors) Jarratt, McGuinness, Wilcox, Elliss plus Derek, Nick Carroll. Too many names, too many to name.

In the '70s, Sydney's northern beach community was the meeting place for multi-faceted men and women of personality, character and conviction. And on any day of surf, ritual would shift from the southern cliffs of the Bower to Queenie or DY Point, Northie, Newport Peak, South Av, Whale Beach Wedge and perhaps all the way to the northern tip, under Barrenjoey Lighthouse. The results were in print or on film in a month, two or three, showcasing groundbreaking surfing, surfer/shaper designs, or the 'deep and meaningful' of credentialed journalism produced by a closeted coastline not ready for medium density housing or the inhibitions of localism.

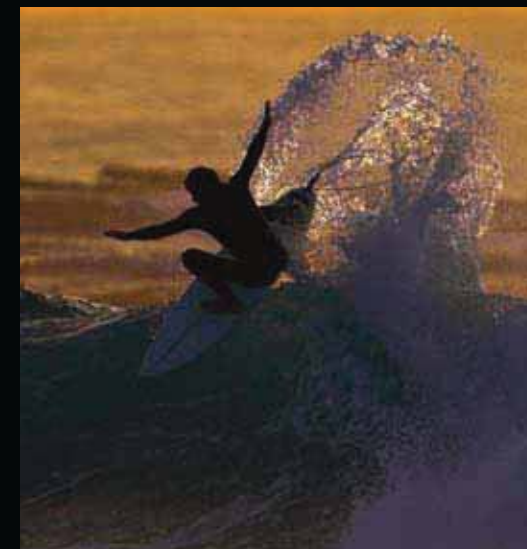
The 2000 Olympics brought postcodes for sale and an army of young professionals, cashed up retirees and Asian investors boosting real estate beyond the reach of those who grew up on this insular peninsula. Demographics have changed as

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As a sand bottom break, Northie has more moods than most, affected by every element including the lake. But, that's what makes it so interesting, a new day, a new week, a new swell. From the famous lefts to Carrie Rights it is a rare day when there is not something to ride.....



The lake mouth berm, so important to an ecosystem fighting man-made change: "it's better when the lake is open," "No it's not, it needs to be closed...!" Last word: OPEN



Oliver Holmes

The 2000 Olympics brought postcodes for sale and an army of young professionals, cashed up retirees and Asian investors boosting real estate beyond the reach of those who grew up on this insular peninsula.



the young have moved away, victims of the free (un)real estate market. 'Community' imploded proportionately as population grew and now, no longer stretches from Manly to Palmy, but has balkanised into enclaves, bordered by the roads either side of each beach's headlands.

These 'mini-communities' are still joined like handholding paper dolls, entities in a sea of three-story multi-million dollar mansions. The original 'big bang' core is leaving, creative and competitive passion is reduced to a level near mediocrity that may, in 2008, not see a Narrabeen surfer on the WCT for the first time since pro-surfing's inception!

The once daily trek along these Northern Beaches is now a drive to your local and you paddle out, no matter what. If the surf is really bad you might go over the hill for some wind protection. Rarely though, do surfers drive the length of the peninsula for a daily session with their peers and contemporaries. Victims of time, traffic, or temerity?

And so it goes.

Located at the mid-point of this tarnishing, but still golden stretch is what could well be that underbelly: North Narrabeen. It was once rare to drive away from here to chase surf anyway, but it's even more so these days. Where it is not so rare to see the world's best appear on better days ... Tommy, Barton, DH, Nick, Baily! The Tour has taken away the younger blokes, Davo, Hedgy and ilk, who cameo between flights. The surf industry? Does its management even surf any more (daily)? Or, even try? A few do.

It is almost as if, as each beach (Manly, Curly, Avalon and so on) intensifies focus into

mini-communities, the community-at-large is de-focusing. Although still a leading outpost of world surfing, Narrabeen is hardly the centre of the universe as it once could claim.

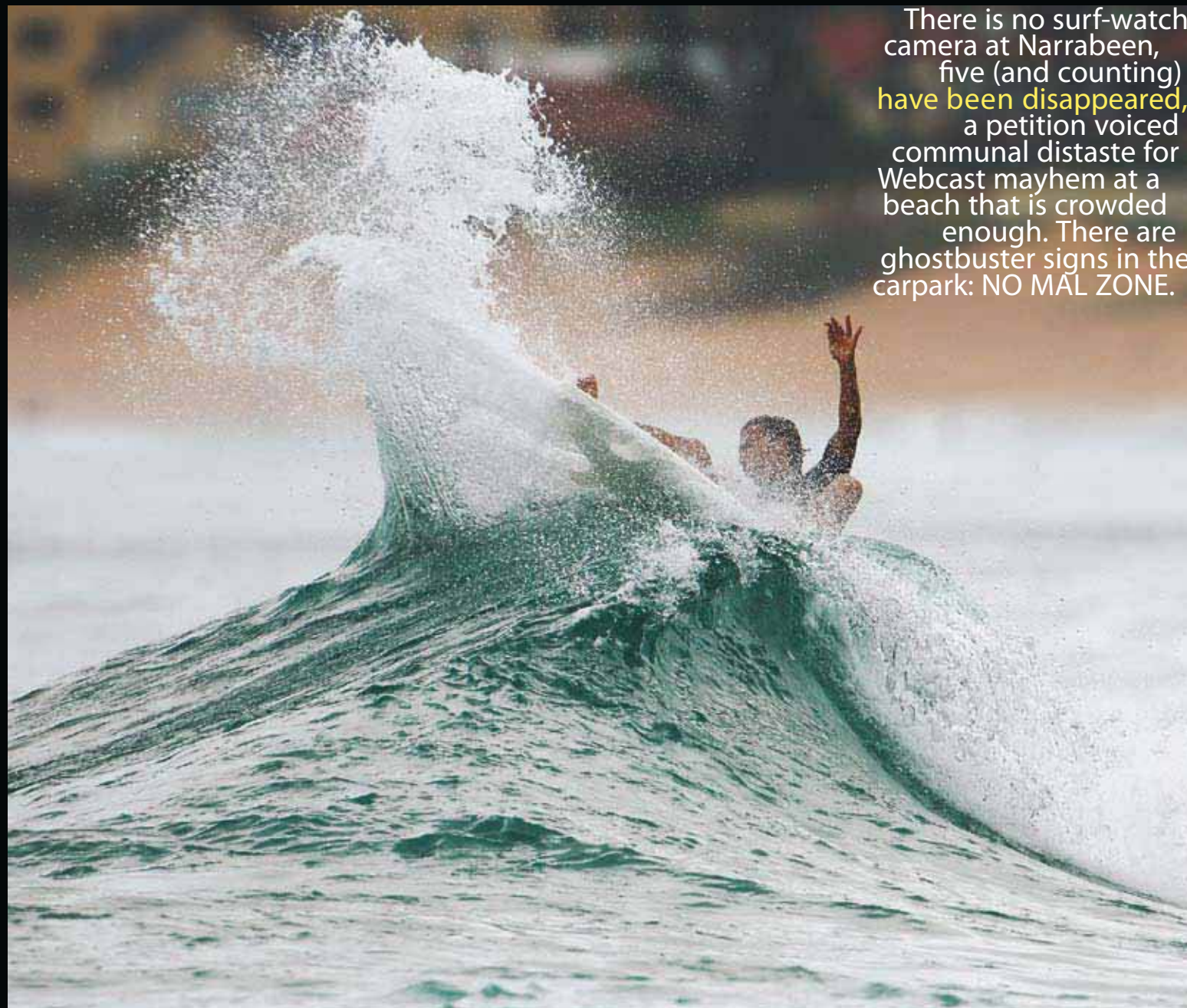
But, as with all passionate lifestyles, there exists underlying committed strength at each of these breaks in those who have built their lives around their daily surf and work. Unsung heroes and their mates, on it the moment Northie or any of the beaches break.

The kids are there. Matty Grainger and Christo Hall have the high performance surf school every Tuesday and Thursday early AM. There is no surf-watch camera at Narrabeen, five (and counting) have disappeared, a petition voiced communal distaste for Webcast mayhem at a beach that is crowded enough. There are ghostbuster signs in the carpark: NO MAL ZONE.

The monthly club contest is a routine most Northern Beaches have on the first Sunday of every month. Parents still competing and immersing their 'luckier than most' offspring in the camaraderie of what has lately been a dormant force: the Australian Boardriders Clubs' production line of world champions (now, again, vindicated by Mick Fanning).

The positive is any weekday morning after the 'before workers' and 'before the day-offers', when you find yourself with only three or four blokes out, a nice little swell and conditions more akin to where you want to be, not where you are. Oh, to be so lucky on a regular basis. These mornings are a taste re-enforcing the faith, for the truly faithful.

As some go, as Andrew Kidman did, to the warmer, less-stressed climes of Byron's hinterland.



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From grom to leading surfer at NN, Ank scored a work experience gig at a local mag and from there climbed the less than commercially gratuitous pole of surfing 'commentary'. I like to think that the Northern Beaches, and particularly Narrabeen, were responsible for grounding Andrew in a level of faith that has produced some of the best comment in the written, photographic and film mediums. Another arrives. This one chap kept turning up on the beach, at dawn, or just after. Turrimetta Head has Northie on one side and Warriewood on the other. Surf whichever depending on which way the wind blows. So, over time, years actually (you have to admire persistence), there he was, every morning, shooting. I don't know what half the time - too small, too cloudy, too backlit, too bad. Liam first showed me some of Mark's shots (teen

amp after having his picture taken) then Kye turned up with a couple. Out of dedication, out of the rain, and the sleet, and the snow, appeared a portfolio. It's my pleasure really to intro the words of Andrew Kidman and images by Mark Onorati; two very different people from very different lives and times. Not much in common actually. Andrew lives and breathes and records inner, artistic 'surf' while Mark, a former sound engineer, charges batteries in new and used caryards all over Sydney after his photographic shoots. Both influenced by a community's change, where fibro holiday cottages have given way to apartment complexes, market garden glasshouses to Macmansions, and a laidback culture to the generation being built on the 21st century economic chant of 'dedication, application, success' - very, very far from an

earlier 'turn on, tune in, drop out' togetherness. Andrew's experience with community destruction (both indigenous and self-inflicted) is counterpointed by Mark's beautiful imagery. And, standing at the lake mouth after nine days of swell, not 50 metres from where the beach helicopter scene in Superman Returns was filmed and where Narrabeen swam, you can almost believe nothing much has changed. There is spirit and it is as strong as ever. Andrew and Mark: one a lifer, the other a ten-year man. Both create, and with their spawn cement the mosaic that is a community in flux, albeit steadied by the sea anchor of North Narrabeen's continuing place in surfing history. An underbelly? Perhaps. An icon? More so!



Then there's the lefts. From mushy flat-faced frustrating windblown mess, to gnashing gnarly ball tearing barrells of fun. It can take two or three attempts at paddle-out only to be belted by a clean-up set. There are still days, big days, when four or five are out alone,....and you can hook a point to the Carpark left, headed for the next postcode.



Dune stabilisation has staightened the beach, but, on the first days after a north swell, when an east or south comes through, when rips have re-formed the banks..... and on the right tide.... Off the Wallisque!





NARRABEEN IS AN ABORIGINAL NAME

EXCERPT from *Surfing World 2000*

The other night I got out of the surf. It was raining some, with no one around; a quiet winter carpark, cold in the wet and hard to get changed. I fumbled about, smelling the rain, trying to move my fingers to the right place. There was one other car across the way. Its light was on with two dark figures up front. I didn't think much of it at first, then one of them got out. As I put my board on the roof he looked over at me and yelled, "Get out there, mate, get out there". He was obviously off his head. He got back in the car. He sat there with his mate for a while. Junkies, I thought. Then I thought, maybe not. Then his mate threw something out the window. He knew I was watching so he got out and picked it up. I had a sick feeling about the whole dark carpark; that feeling when the devil's around. Then they drove off leaving some kind of package on the ground.

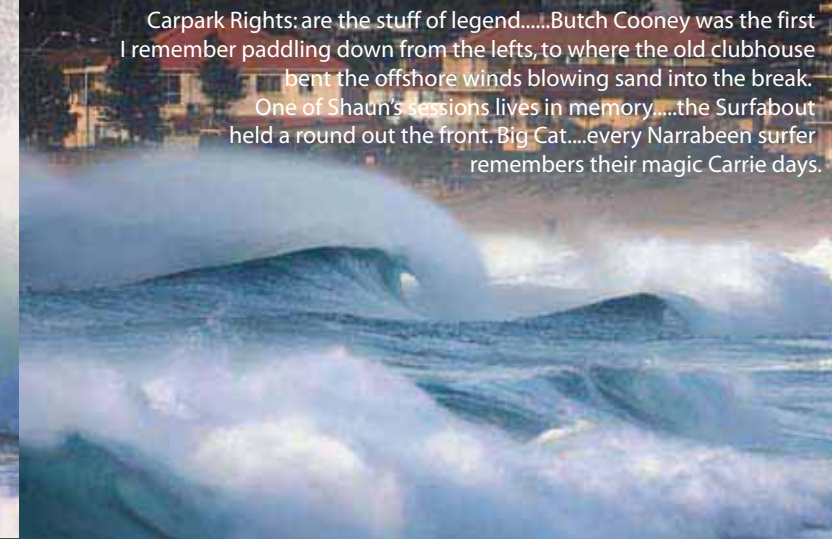
A couple came past with their dog, the dog sniffed at the package and the lady bent down to pick it up. "What is it?" I asked. "Syringes," she said. Junkies, I thought again. Made me sad, made me angry. I felt violated by the whole experience. I got into my car and started driving home in the rain. I hated the place. Everything I'd loved as a kid had been raped and torn apart back in the carpark. I hated the carpark; the carpark that never was, the carpark the council just decided one day they would lay for eternity. They never asked anyone that lived in the area - they just did it and began charging people to park. If you didn't pay rates, like most of us kids didn't because we couldn't afford to buy houses, you had to pay to park. We couldn't afford to pay for parking so we ended up on the street.



Damn.
What a lucky
man!



Ben



Carpark Rights: are the stuff of legend.....Butch Cooney was the first I remember paddling down from the lefts, to where the old clubhouse bent the offshore winds blowing sand into the break. One of Shaun's sessions lives in memory....the Surfabout held a round out the front. Big Cat....every Narrabeen surfer remembers their magic Carrie days.



Joel

Air came to Narrabeen during the Original HB/O&E Pro-Juniors and lead generational change that some still do not understand. Respect for ability, and flare, is a constant where 'average' is much more than anywhere.

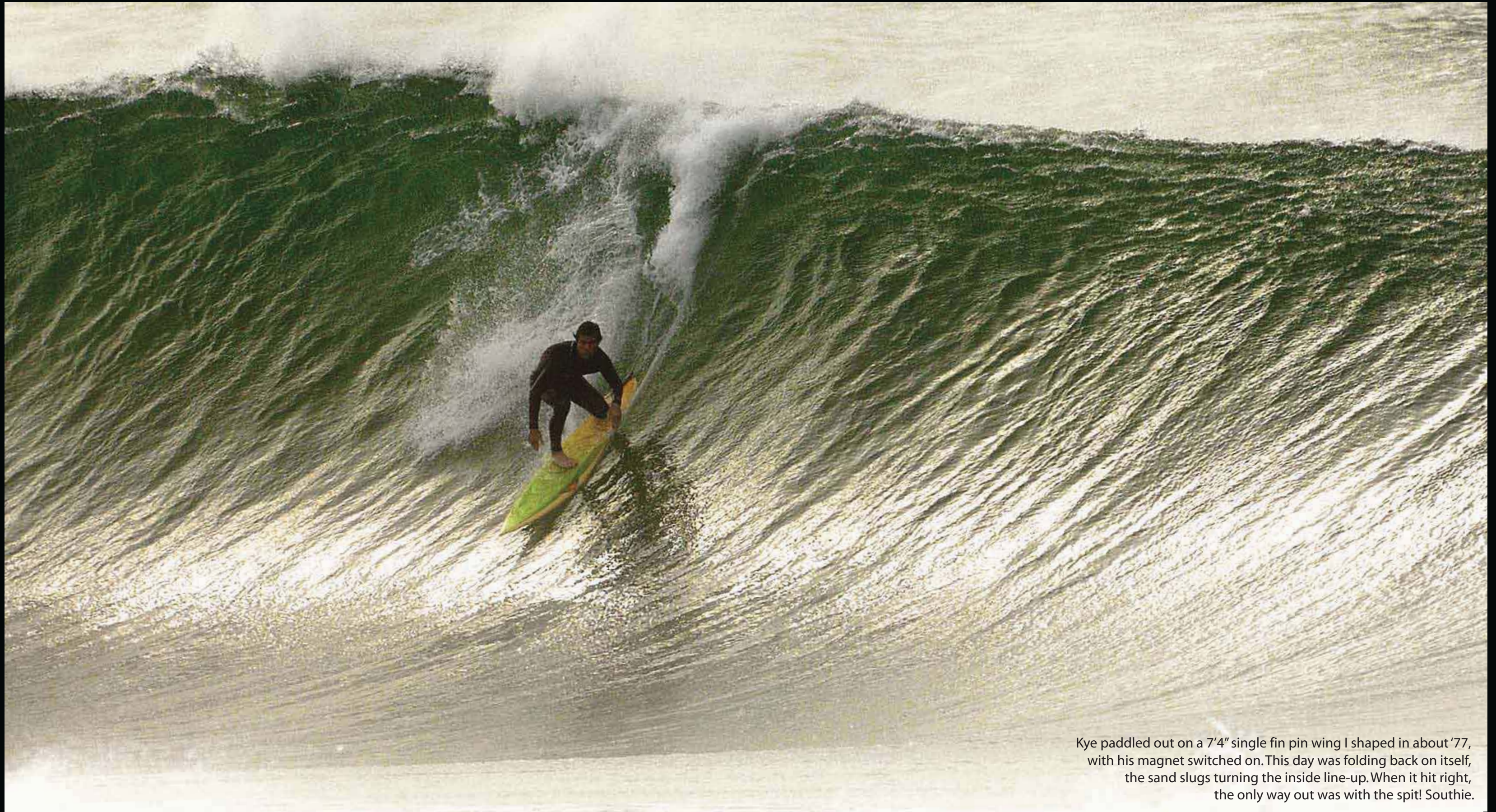
There is nothing better than pulling into a Car Park pit. And getting smashed. Completion rate has dropped since the banks went straight, but, now and again, maybe one in ten.... the door opens and you live again. It's one of the few places a regular footer can get his own back on the goofies. They might face the lefts, but, down the beach, it can be death.



Ben

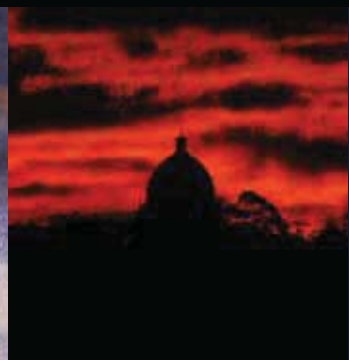


Kye



Kye paddled out on a 7'4" single fin pin wing I shaped in about '77, with his magnet switched on. This day was folding back on itself, the sand slugs turning the inside line-up. When it hit right, the only way out was with the spit! Southie.





I began thinking about the wall at the swimming club where as kids we all used to hang. The sun shone on the wall, heating it in the Autumn afternoons. We'd get out of the surf and press our bodies into the wall, our hides soaking up the warm bricks. The sun and the last of the hot offshore winds would dry us. There was an old tree there that would sometimes grow a little too much and stop the sun from making it to the wall. We'd rip off the branches and keep it small. The old guys with cars would drive down to check

the surf after work. They'd pull in near the swimming club, park, get out, and sit on the steps that walked themselves up the side of the wall. They'd lived in Narrabeen their whole lives, they loved the place. They'd sit in the sun and smoke their durries and ask about how the surf was. We thought they were legends. Then we'd go for the late with them, they'd change and paddle across the lake with us. We'd paddle out in the rip with them and they'd rip up the Alley Rights. They loved us grommets.

Then the council began putting up 'NO PARKING' signs where the old guys parked. Then the council put up fences and warning signs where we walked. Then the council sent parking rangers down and the parking rangers would give the old guys tickets. Sometimes there were fights and the cops were called. Then the council came and put a gate across the road and locked it. I moved away from Narrabeen. It wasn't the same anymore, it was all fenced off, and the old guys were

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I moved away from Narrabeen. It wasn't the same anymore, it was all fenced off, and the old guys were gone. There were places where you could walk and park and there were places where you couldn't.

gone. There were places where you could walk and park and there were places where you couldn't. Then the sand dune the council bulldozed into place for dune stabilisation collapsed into the lake mouth and closed its tidal flow off. The lake mouth that used to be so big and deep that you needed some kind of ocean-minded skill just to negotiate it. Sometimes in a big southerly swell you wouldn't even make it across. You'd be swept down in the torrent towards the bridge.

You know what? I'm not even sure what I'm trying to say here, but I'm tired. I'm tired of trying to find somewhere to live in a place I grew up in. I'm tired of moving, moving, moving, trying to find a place that feels like home where I didn't grow up. When I paddle back out the Alley and I see the old guys that are back from wherever they went it makes me happy 'cause I know they haven't given up on the place where they grew up. And I can understand how indigenous people of Australia feel. I am happy to feel

like that because I'm an Australian. And the day goes on. The tree by the wall grows because there are no kids to break it down, its shadow covers the wall where we all once were. And just last week there was a storm, a storm that lashed the coast with a week's worth of waves, a storm that rose the lake so high the entrance burst and all the sand washed out and now you've got to paddle across the lake again. And I thought to myself, as the rain kept coming down, fuck the junkies, let God sort 'em out.

