

RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE



We woke to the sounds of drums in the jungle. In the tropical morning light thousands of people from local villages and all around Papua New Guinea pilgrimaged to the very rural Tupira Surf Club, the site of PNG's first international surfing competition. They wanted to see the finest professional longboard surfing along with the village locals riding their boards made from timber. It promised to be an exchange of culture on a new level for PNG . . . and for the visitors.

(main photo) Swells arrive in long organised lines from winter lows in the distant North Pacific, and at Tupira the surfer can wade into the water from a tiny beach and paddle out without getting a hair wet. Nic Jones, keeping it dry.

Photo: Andrew Carruthers

(opposite page) (insert top) The opening ceremony, let's go surfin'! (bottom) Dane Pioli milks it through "Coconut Corner" in the Wood Board Teams Challenge which featured mixed teams of locals and visitors. *Photos: Jason/SAPNG*





(left) Build it, the swell will come. *Photo: Jason/SAPNG*



(right) Clans came from all over and donned full traditional dress for the opening ceremony. *Photo: Andrew Carruthers*

THE LOCALS

Dancers arrived from the four corners of the nation to perform the traditional welcoming ceremony in full dress, dignitaries spoke, and the simple surf club of Tupira was transformed into a modern hub digitally connected to a world audience. Just a week before, modernity hardly impacted these people, with no electricity in homes, running water, or modern conveniences. Now the local kids were watching themselves surfing their wooden craft on big computer screens at 80 frames a second.

The villagers and surrounding communities had worked hard for months to make the many preparations necessary for housing the numerous guests descending on their stretch of coast. They'd built grandstands, stages, toilet blocks, houses for the TV and webcasting equipment, and put up 80 durable tents, everything they could do for the event to run smoothly. One important job was left to the "Kukurai" or the village chiefs, and that was to call in the surf. The elders sat by the sea and asked for a swell to come that would test the competitors and make the contest a success. The villagers then set to work making a two-metre tall sandbag wall to hold back the surf from washing the shoreline and spectators away.

A week later the swell appeared on the long-range charts. The morning of the contest one of the best swells in years rolled in, and after the final heat it melted away under a strong blast of wind. This was some PNG magic . . . and it seemed to be in the air throughout the entire event.

THE INTERNATIONAL GUESTS

A family reunion is in progress as each vehicle arrives with the qualifiers to the contest. They've come from all over and I'm completely taken aback by the genuine and universal happiness the reunited longboarders express as they gather on the beach overlooking the point. The last time

they got together was three months ago in China, previous to that was twelve months before, also in China. This is a community I want to be a part of. When I surfed my last professional contest a quarter of a century ago in California, the longboard community then was far from happy or cohesive. As I mingle with this crew I feel lucky that some of the older competitors recognise me from movies and my surfboards, and I feel welcomed.

As they made it into the water to sample the waves of Tupira I was expecting those feelings of unity and family might soon be vanishing. But instead there were laughs and cheers all round as waves were shared amid the relaxed and orderly flow of surfers through the line-up. The female longboarders were seamlessly shoulder-to-shoulder with the men, even when the surf was pumping at double-overhead and pounding on the coral reef. I had to recalibrate my old mind to make sense of delicate looking teenage girls taking late drops in the pit on nine-foot-plus boards and then stepping elegantly through the steepest sections.

It seemed to me that this was a new longboarding; different from all I'd known in my many years of riding, making, and promoting longboards. It was different to the club contests, the state titles and the festivals. It felt like the WSL longboard community is a tight working unit creating a new version of longboarding. The vibe is energetic, polite, thankful, and proactive. And joyful. They really like being here and enjoy each other's company. This is not a job but a passion.

THE WAVE

The Tupira Surf Club is on the northern coast of PNG facing the Bismarck Sea. Swells arrive in long organized lines from winter lows in the distant North Pacific. The point has a uniquely perfect reef set up where a deep canyon stretches from

the depths along the line of the reef and ends at a tiny sandy beach where the surfer can wade into the water and paddle out without getting a hair wet. The swells first feel the reef at the top of the point and slow while the rest of the wave is still in deep water moving fast. This pulls the deep-water wall into the point creating a heavy bowl that doubles the wave height and power and acts as a perfect canvas for the artistry of the competitors. When the wind was offshore the barrel would hold up and making it out was a matter of holding on through the foam ball. The bowl then backs off into a steep shoulder which seems to come at the surfer, making for hugely impressive driving cutbacks. This is the dream situation for the tri-fin longboard, where the long rail is fully engaged in the turn and the fins are under full pressure. This driving longboard arc while on a full rail is a thing of beauty.

Harley Ingleby stated, "Having a wave that grows and comes at you is great! Offshore you go for a barrel and onshore a really committed turn. There is just enough room on this wave to get a combination of noserides, turns and barrels. From a competition standpoint it's brilliant because the wave lends itself to the full repertoire of longboarding in a short space."

The inside section is a test of its own as what looks like a friendly shoulder soon drains out onto a nearly exposed coral reef. The rider is faced with going for the last scoring point and a potential skin-tearing wipeout, or pulling out with grace and letting the rest of the wave go.

In the men's final, where there is no holding back, the tide was high and Kai Sallas and Taylor Jensen were hitting the lip over the reef and landing their fins in a two-metre stretch of slightly deeper water inside the reef. I couldn't believe that neither of them lost a fin in the tight reef situation.

Loving it: Australian Jared Neal (top), Justin Mauvin from France and Crystal Walsh from Hawaii (centre), and Peruvian Piccolo Clemente (bottom). Photos: Andrew Carruthers



THE BIG STORY

A series of stories were woven into the fabric of this event, which may have created a whole new style of surf competition. Along with gaining points and crowning champions, this contest was about a cultural exchange, empowerment of the local surfing communities, as well as being a vehicle for social change, for progress.

The Surfing Association of Papua New Guinea (SAPNG) and its founder Andy Abel have had a long history of progressive thinking in the field of sustainable surf tourism (there've been four articles featured in this mag alone over the past 12 years). The SAPNG mandate is that local communities must benefit in the exchange with international travellers. The locals are not to be bystanders while foreigners reap all the profits from their locales and their efforts.

The Tupira Surf Club is owned by the local community and it seemed that each villager did their very best to make the visitors welcome and comfortable in what is essentially their home. In return, the locals benefited with numerous jobs, sales of local

products and produce, and importantly, from the remarkable cultural exchange with the visitors. The sharing of surfing culture included intertwining the professional surfing with heats showcasing the local surfers and the wood surfboards the villagers had produced. A teams challenge where a pro was matched with a local surfer started out with just a few volunteers but quickly blew out to 52 competitors making up 26 teams. And it ran for three and a half hours in front of a cheering crowd of thousands. In a typical response from the visitors, Rachael Tilly spoke about sharing a heat with a young girl from Tevulte, a neighbouring village, "We had such an amazing, fun time out there supporting each other, capitalising on each other's strengths and creating a team."

The local board builders were given a huge boost by sharing their surfboards with the pros and watching how incredibly well they could be surfed. Peter from Korak helped me announce the heats and his comments were warmly appreciated by the large local crowd. I asked him, "How many surfboard shapers get to watch 26

of the world's top pros ride the boards they made?" And then answered the question for him, "One . . . you!"

A second issue addressed by SAPNG is women's equality with a focus on eradicating domestic violence. The teams challenge with mixed male and female surfers showed how the collective culture of surfing embraces both sexes. Throughout the entire event there was a clear harmony among all the pros that set an example of how this is expected in surfing. Ruthie, a local female surfer, was invited into the contest as a wildcard and impressed everybody, nearly making it through the first round with some big late drops behind the bowl. The crowds cheered her loudly after ever wave. After her heat, as a gesture of solidarity some of the surfers organized to carry her on their shoulders for a lap through the crowd. I followed behind and was surprised when some of the locals looked concerned and asked me, "What has happened to Ruthie, is she hurt?" The shoulder victory lap didn't translate into PNG culture perhaps, but maybe it will from now on.

THE FRESH APPROACH

Surfing Association of Papua New Guinea's "Surf Management Plan" is a world first and ensures that the local communities that own the reefs, beaches and marine environments are consulted as to whether they want to become involved in surfing. If they do, then community leaders establish the number of surf tourists per day they'll allow through their area. Each surf tourist then pays up-front levies (around AUD\$50 on arrival and \$10 per day) that funnels straight back to fund surfing development at the village level and also community projects like aid posts, water sanitation projects and educational facilities.

– Danny O'Brien
(excerpt from an article in *PLB* Vol13#5)



The guys who did the hard yards: Will Hayden-Smith from the WSL, Andy Abel from SAPNG, and Justice Nicholas Kirriwom. Andy's in demand as a speaker/educationalist with tourism bodies around the world for his work on sustainable tourism, while Tupira local Nicholas Kirriwom is a Justice at the Supreme Court of PNG, and the patron of the Tupira Surf Club.

THE PINK NOSE REVOLUTION

By Easley Britton

Andy Abel, president and co-founder of SAPNG, has initiated a powerful and innovative campaign to raise awareness about issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, using surfing as the tool to get local communities on-board.

Women's participation in surfing in PNG is challenged by a lack of accessibility due to poor recognition of their equal place in society and a lack of ownership of surf equipment with priority going to male surfers, as well as high rates of domestic violence and a culture which primarily supports the dominance of male leadership or 'Big Men.' Many of these issues, especially the prevalence and impact of violence against women and domestic violence are not PNG issues but global issues, which makes the Pink Nose Surfboard Policy all the more exciting as a tool for change.

This is a simple but powerful tool to promote women's participation in surfing and to give women greater ownership and recognition in the surf. By painting the noses of half of all surfboards donated to PNG pink, female surfers are given exclusive ownership of their own surfboards and their equal status is made visible.

Andy, along with SAPNG and the ambassador for Tupira Surf Club, Justice

Nicholas Kirriwom, is passionate about the power of surfing to empower local communities, and they do not mince their words when it comes to promoting this new policy:

"Surfers against violence against women – empowering women with equal rights and opportunities"

This is the slogan on the new stickers that are being printed to go on all donated surfboards that are distributed amongst PNG's surf clubs. The local surf clubs are members of SAPNG and the Surf Management Plan (SMP), which is a leading example of how to take a "surf-sustainable" approach to tourism development with direct benefits for local communities-the "resource custodians".

This is a process that SAPNG, along with local surf clubs and communities have been developing and implementing in PNG for over 28 years.



Local Ruthie surfing beautifully on her revolutionary "Pink Nose".
Photos: Jason/SAPNG



"There is just enough room on this wave to get a combination of noserides, turns and barrels!" This was the first round of a two-event series to decide the 2017 WSL World Champions.

(top photos) Now in pole position, the Tupira Champs Taylor Jensen and Chloe Calmon.

(above) Harley Ingleby on a quad-fin, and local wildcard Titima Mange who nailed a couple of the best barrels of the week.

(below) The full crew of competitors. And everyone got a hand-carved trophy.
Photos: Andrew Carruthers





(far left) 2015 World Champ Rachael Tilly with Leah, a surfer from a neighbouring village: "We had such an amazing, fun time out there, supporting each other, creating a team."
 (left) Says Tom Wegener: "If you had a huge supply of balsa and perfect waves on your doorstep, what boards would you make? To my surprise the local rippers went for finless alaia shapes over finned boards (of course I was stoked). In the centre is Justice Nicholas Kirriwom, I'm to his left with Brain Bates in front. I wish I could name all the surfers. They're beautiful kids and just as stoked on surfing as any other groms in the world."
 (below) A perfect wall, Victoria Vergara off for a stroll. Photo: WSL/Tim Hain



Two panorama shots taken from two spots well apart, just to try to fit the crowd in. *Photos: Jason/SAPNG*



Runner-up in this first round, Hawaiian Kai Sallas, right at home. *Photo: Andrew Carruthers*

REFLECTIONS:

After the award ceremony I was able to sit with a few pros and reflect on what happened. I asked Nava Young about her highlights and she said, "For me it was watching the traditional clans in their different dress . . . it was like a dream, amazing. There is obviously so much community spirit here and we can really learn from this."

Rachael Tilly said, "I know all of the

surfers who were here would agree that being a part of something much greater than the competition was wonderful. We will walk away knowing we had an experience much greater than just scoring points. This is one of the best trips we have ever been on."

Maybe this is the future template for longboarding competitions. Could it be about the sharing of culture and concepts, weaved into the fabric of a surfing

contest, with the visitors and locals both experiencing new things and benefitting. Should the WSL incorporate a focus on this for future contests?

I asked Rachael for a few words summing up her vision for longboarding and she quickly replied, "Community, positivity, outreach and athleticism." Is this the new longboarding? I hope so!