

# 20

THE SPORT OF SURFING

ISSUE

02

PIPELINE  
OAHU, HAWAII

## THE PIPELINE ISSUE





PHOTO: WSL/KIRSTIN SCHOLTZ

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Fear. It's a central part of the surfing experience, even if it's seldom acknowledged. From pros to beginners, all who enter the water know what it's like to encounter a situation beyond their abilities. We hope to overcome our jitters in that moment. But how?

For clues we turn in this issue to "Pipeline," a Hawaiian wave on the North Shore of Oahu that is now at its most intimidating as Arctic storms roll south and mix with the tropical air of the Western Pacific. Pipeline presents countless perils, from its steep drop and treacherous lip to a cavernous mass of coral reef waiting just below the water's surface. Surfers that survive those hazards submit to a whirling funnel of water and a shower of spray.

Twenty Magazine asked a group of accomplished surfers to share their first Pipeline experiences. What we learned is that all had to battle through terror. "Anyone who surfs Pipeline, if they tell you they're not scared, they're lying to you and they're lying to themselves," said surfer Liam McNamara. The first known woman to surf Pipeline, Joyce Hoffman, said of her first ride: "I was definitely afraid."

The solution – the same for pros as for beginners testing their local break – is practice, patience and commitment. For Kelly Slater, repeated exposure to Pipeline over a period of many years erased the fright of a first experience that ended with the future 11-time world champion pinned "on my back flat against the reef." For Shaun Tomson, another world champion, "it wasn't like you go out, you catch one wave and that's it, you've conquered your fears. It took a few years to find my footing."

This month we have another opportunity to see how top athletes approach this challenge during the Billabong Pipe Masters, which offers a Super Bowl-style spectacle in the final pro surfing event of the year. You can see all heats live December 8–20 at [www.worldsurfleague.com](http://www.worldsurfleague.com). The surfing world will be watching to see whether newly crowned world champion John John Florence, a North Shore local who grew up surfing Pipeline, can win his first Masters. Brazilian Gabriel Medina will be there to challenge Florence in what has the potential to be a rivalry to watch over the next decade.

There with his camera will be photographer Tom Servais, responsible for two Pipeline images that resonate with surfers 25 years after they were taken. We asked Servais to explain in his own words why these photos of a "cutback" and a "snap" are still so meaningful to so many who enjoy the sport. Watching the contest from his front porch will be 82-year-old Warren Harlow, whose house is so close to Pipeline its foundation sometimes vibrates from the force of the wave. Harlow talked to writer Alex Roth about his 53-year-long relationship with Pipeline's frights and sights, including half a dozen rescues and the exploits of a 5-year-old Laird Hamilton.

The dangers of Pipeline are real. Seven have perished there in the last 27 years and countless others have been injured. Hawaiian Water Patrol's Brian Keaulana said visitors often underestimate these hazards and as a result he sends them to the other end of Oahu, where the waves are more forgiving. But he understands Pipeline's allure: "That's what makes it so beautiful – the dangers."

**Dan Fitzpatrick**, editor

# THE PIPELINE ISSUE

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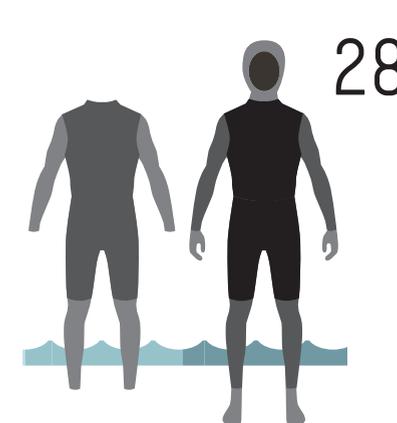
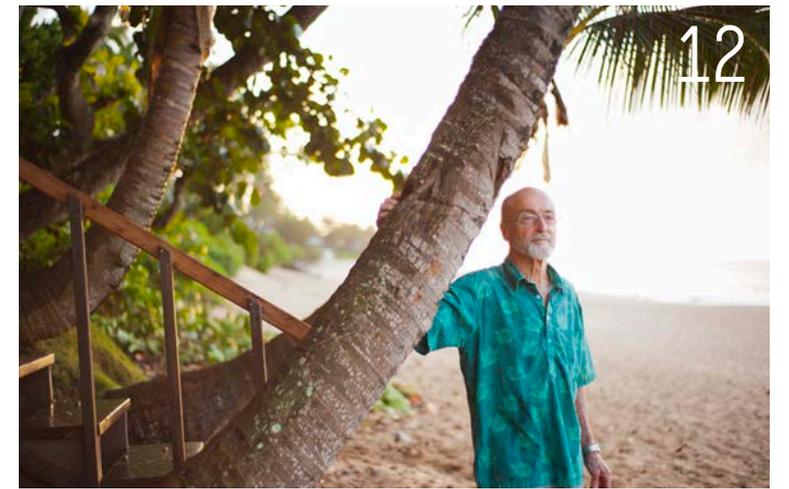
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COVER ILLUSTRATION OF 2016 WORLD CHAMPION JOHN JOHN FLORENCE BY YU-MING HUANG

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ILLUSTRATION: IGNACIO SERRANO

# FACTING PIPELINE

ELEVEN ACCOMPLISHED SURFERS RECALL THEIR FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS WAVE.

Interviews conducted  
by Alex Roth and Dan Fitzpatrick



**ANYONE WHO SURFS PIPELINE, IF THEY TELL YOU THEY'RE NOT SCARED, THEY'RE LYING TO YOU AND THEY'RE LYING TO THEMSELVES.** LIAM MCNAMARA

LIAM  
MCNAMARA

**North Shore local who became fiery 1990s fixture at Pipeline.**

When I was kid in like 1982, 1983, I snuck out of school and got to watch the Pipe Masters and was completely amazed by it.

If dreams were to come true, this was going to be a wave I'd attempt to ride. I actually witnessed one guy smash his head on the reef, another guy got his knee torn apart. So I was aware of the dangers, I was aware that you were risking your life. I was a kid who had a dream of being a Pipeline surfer, a North Shore surfer, making a name for myself.

Around 1985, when I was 16, I first started surfing there on the smaller days and probably went out on a few decent-size days. I was told by my elders that I would never be able to ride Pipeline because I get up to my feet rather slow. They called me the one-step, two-step. I took that to heart.

My first year of charging big waves at Pipeline was 1986. I remember definitely being scared. Anybody who surfs Pipeline, anybody who surfs big waves, if they tell you they're not scared, they're lying to you and they're lying to themselves. It's a matter of taking that fear and adrenaline and turning it into motivation. So I remember at first trying to sit a little bit in the safety zone, although in reality there's not much of a safety zone once you're out there. I do remember getting my first tube rides out there and it's a feeling that's very hard to describe but it was a feeling I wanted a lot more of – making the drop, which is the heaviest part of the whole thing, and then pulling into the tube and enjoying being inside Mother Nature's womb and then getting spit

out of a barrel. Time slows down when you're in the barrel. It's the ultimate place to be – you're inside the curl of a wave, nobody can see you, you can't see anybody. When you get spit out of a barrel at Pipeline, it's like a fire hose blowing on you. It's like needles hitting your face because the spray and spit is so powerful. You have to close your eyes a lot of times when you're coming out. The spit hurts, but it's a good hurt. Any good wave at Pipeline spits.

The crowd can be even more intimidating at Pipeline. You're in the limelight. You're at the 50-yard line. You're in the Super Bowl. Everybody's watching. If you drop the pass, people will know. You gotta earn stripes out there. When I first started surfing Pipeline in the 80s, that was the decade that would be remembered as the heaviest decade with the heaviest legends. I dealt with the Who's Who of the Hawaiian warrior legends – Dane Kealoha, Michael and Derek Ho, Tony Moniz, Max Medeiros, Marvin Foster, Johnny-Boy Gomes, Gerry Lopez. If you paddled for a wave and even chirped a word out of your mouth, if even half a whisper came out of your mouth, you'd probably wished



BALARAM STACK. PHOTO: RICARDO SANTOS LUIS

you never did say a word because you're disrespecting your elders. You don't hoot at locals. If you do, you're disrespecting them. So what I did was I paddled 100 feet deeper, 200 feet deeper than everyone in the lineup. Go deep, put your head down, paddle hard and whatever you do, don't pull back. And whatever you do, don't say a word and just go.

BALARAM  
STACK

**New York pro surfer who rides Pipeline each winter.**

I had seen photos and videos but it wasn't ever a wave I imagined surfing like I do now. It was just one of those famous spots you see the pros surf. I went over when I was 13 and ended up checking out Pipe for the first time. We paddled out and it was probably 4 to 6 foot. Big enough to see that there was a channel, which is where we sat the whole time and just watched. I was so blown away by this wave that breaks in the same spot every time. I hadn't really traveled too much before that. Just the waves I grew up with in New

York and on the East Coast. So just seeing it in person was crazy to me. Reef (McIntosh) was a huge mentor. He would be the one who would tell me to go out on the days when no one was out and it was huge and he would paddle out with me. I only did that because Reef made me do it. It takes time to figure out how to get waves and how to deal with the crowd. It's not like you are just surfing. People think it's a lot easier than it is to go and do it. I see people who are little bit in over their head, I see people dropping in on people and it's dangerous. Three or four years ago in the Volcom Pipe Pro I got a 10 in my second heat. It was probably the best thing that has ever happened to me in a contest. There is so much adrenaline. I remember coming out of the barrel and being oh my god that just happened. I was so baffled that it happened I couldn't comprehend it until I saw it on video. It was big and perfect and spit me out. It's a big powerful wave but you just take it for what it is and run with it. I've gotten stitches here and there. There is always something crazy that happens. I don't try to focus on those times. Whatever happens happens. I just try to think about surfing. That's it.

MARK  
HEALEY

**Big wave specialist.**

It was me, Jamie O'Brien, Jason Frederico and Danny Fuller and it was all of our first times going out. We camped on the beach so we could be paddling out in the dark just because there's no way we could get waves otherwise. When you're young, it's just a scary lineup. That was back when things were a lot rougher. You'd see guys getting their face punched in every other day. You could be a kid and get your ass kicked by a grown man

**THE SIZE IS NOT THE MAIN ISSUE AT PIPELINE. IT'S THE POWER OF THE WAVE AND HOW SHALLOW IT IS OVER THOSE REEFS.** JOYCE HOFFMAN

just for being in the way. So we were trying to get our first little experience in before anybody showed up. It was probably four to six feet. We all surfed it together. The velocity of the wave is so different to anything even on the North Shore. It's a lot more power. You have to get to your feet a lot faster. So everybody was kind of nervous. Jamie broke his board. It was the first time any of us had ever seen a friend break his board. It was like, "Woah, he broke a board at Pipeline," you know? I think I just got pitched a few times and then we ended up going in.

JOYCE  
HOFFMAN

**First woman to surf Pipeline; won two world championships in the 1960s.**

I was the first woman to surf Pipeline. To be perfectly honest, I basically went out because Bud Browne was on the beach filming and he told me if I went out he could film it and it would be history. So I swallowed hard and put on my best game face and figured I'd do it. I was definitely afraid and probably wouldn't have gone out at that time if Bud hadn't been there and given me that extra little push. I just sort of figured, what the hell, I've surfed bigger surf than that. I'd be out at Makaha when it was 15 or 18 foot. I'd been out at Sunset when it was 12 or 15 foot. Of course, the size is not the main issue at Pipeline. It's the power of the wave and how shallow it is over those reefs. I was probably on a 9-6 Hobie, a Phil Edwards-type board. It was probably 1964, maybe 1965. The surf seemed

friggin humongous but it was probably four feet with eight-foot sets. On the same day, before I went out, Bob Pike from Australia had bounced off the bottom and came in with his shoulder cut open and his ear half-way sliced off. And I'm there with my family – my mom and my dad – and I remember my mom being pretty upset and worried that I was going to be paddling out there into God knows what. But it went ok. I caught some waves and fortunately there wasn't a big crowd out there – not like there is today – and the guys that were out there were guys that I knew, because you kind of knew everybody back in those days. So it was a very friendly crowd that gave me space to take off on whatever wave I felt comfortable taking. At one point, I got stuck in the rip and Phil Edwards actually came over and helped paddle me in. I wanted to be the first. If it wasn't going to be me, it was going to be somebody soon. At the end, I think I was feeling very relieved that I conquered my fears and nothing bad happened. And I was very grateful that Bud Browne was there and caught it on film. Timing is everything.



JOYCE HOFFMAN. PHOTO: UCLA LIBRARY

**THE VELOCITY OF THE WAVE IS SO DIFFERENT TO ANYTHING EVEN ON THE NORTH SHORE. IT'S A LOT MORE POWER.** MARK HEALEY

JOCK  
SUTHERLAND

*Tube-riding authority who first surfed Pipeline in the 1960s.*

I think I was 14 and I lived four or five miles away from Pipeline. I was a couple years away from getting my license but I had some friends who could drive. This was probably 1962 or 63. My buddies hauled me down there. This is when we all surfed longboards so I was probably surfing a 9-6 or 9-8 foam board. It was the one board I owned. It was not a very big day – maybe six feet, maybe occasional 8 foot. I'd already surfed big waves in other spots on the North Shore so I wasn't too worried about the size. There weren't many people out, if at all. The day was pretty-user friendly, so not a big fear factor, but after a few face-plantings you did come away with a sense of respect. And we were taught pretty quickly that there was a unique speed factor and that this was a wave of consequence. After I had ridden it about three or four times, I realized, ok, you can get really dusted here. I rode it on a little bit bigger days and got wiped out once or twice and it was pretty deeply impressed upon me how consequential it could be. I was on a wave in 1981 and delayed my turn because a friend was paddling out and the wave came over my shoulder and drove me into my board and broke my femur. When I go out to Pipe nowadays – which is not too often but there are user-friendly days – it's nice to paddle out with my son because he knows all the young lions and everything's cool. I can get a few waves and have a good time. And people will yell, "Go, Jock, go!" and that can be dangerous because you think, "I can do this, I can do this," but if you don't take that extra paddle or it's a little too off-shore windy you get can hung up on the lip and you're not going down the face, you're going out – and that's a very bad feeling.

GAVIN  
SUTHERLAND

*Pro surfer, Jock Sutherland's son.*

It was a nervous moment. I was like 13 or 14. Growing up with my dad being a legend and one of the first guys to surf it when it was big, that's big boots to fill. But when you're young, you really want to go out there and try it. It probably took a year of me checking it with my friends after school and then we all had to get up the courage to say, "You know, we're just going to go out and do it." It wasn't big that day. It was six feet. Backdoor was working. There was a crowd out. You don't want to look like an idiot in front of all the boys. I think I was surfing a Charlie Smith 6-8 or something. It was just a nice sunny morning and it was really inviting and it wasn't super-super big and treacherous but big enough to get your heart racing. I paddled out with a buddy. There were heavies out that day – Johnny-Boy Gomes and Sunny Garcia. It was like, yikes, ok, those guys get the pick of the litter and we'll just take these little scraps. I actually caught waves right off the bat. I just kind of started catching shoulders, little hop-overs, they kind of hop over the main peak and go toward the channel that has a sandbar, which is a little bit safer. So I had a great time. It wasn't super-scary. It was actually a really great first session at Pipeline. If your first session at Pipeline is a bad one and you're sucked over the falls, you probably won't want to go back to that very quickly. But having a nice, medium-sized day and me catching a few waves definitely boosted my confidence. Of course, having my dad be a pioneer of Pipeline was also a confidence-booster. It's in the genes so I know it's possible.

**YOU LEARN VERY EARLY AT PIPELINE THAT IF YOU COMMIT, YOU BETTER KEEP GOING.** MICKEY MUNOZ

**IF YOUR FIRST SESSION AT PIPELINE IS A BAD ONE AND YOU'RE SUCKED OVER THE FALLS, YOU PROBABLY WON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO THAT VERY QUICKLY.**

GAVIN SUTHERLAND

MICKY  
MUNOZ

*Pioneering surfer of the 1950s and 1960s.*

I've only ridden big Pipeline a few times. I might have been surfing a 9-foot board, maybe even a balsa board. There were only a handful of people that had ridden there. I was much better going right than left because I grew up on right-hand point breaks at Malibu and Rincon. So I started going right at Pipeline. That suited my style. And if there was a crowd at all at Pipeline, I'd go right because everybody was going left. You learn very early at Pipeline that if you commit, you better keep going. Better to keep going, even if you've made a mistake, because the wipe-outs are usually less than if at the last second, you go, oh shit, I screwed up, and now you get sucked over the falls and the wipe-outs are a lot worse. That was a severe lesson that you learned very quickly. Also, what I found is that you're better taking off as far over in the pit as possible, even if you can't make it. You don't want to take off on the edge because at that point the wave is already going full-force and it's going a lot faster than you are and you end up going over the falls. You do two or three mistakes and you say, ok, I get it, this is how I'm going to play it. Very possibly because of those lessons, that's why I started going right.

SHAUN  
TOMSON

*South African who won a world championship in 1977.*

The first time was 1970. I was 15. Back then, no one rode it when they were young. In South

Africa, I had a picture above my bed of John Peck surfing Pipeline in a crouch, and I knew that was the path – Pipeline was the path for me. I always understood that Pipeline was the road to greatness for a surfer, and still is. Unless you can be great at Pipeline, you'll never be great.

A few years earlier a Peruvian surfer named Joaquin Miro Quesada had died at Pipeline and it had been in the magazines and I'd read about it and there had been a picture of him just before he was killed. So it always stuck in my consciousness that if you make a mistake there, it could kill you. So I was very nervous during my first surf there and sitting more on the shoulder. I saw a guy on a knee board take off on a wave and as he's dropping down on the wave, the wave was lifting him up and he was going up backwards against the force of gravity and it threw him upside down like 15 feet away from where I was sitting. It shocked me to my core to see a wave that had so much force. And it smashed him right into the reef



SHAUN TOMSON DROPPING INTO PIPE. PHOTO: JAMES CASSIMUS

and he walked up the beach bloodied and broken. Welcome to the reality of the Banzai Pipeline, where down is up. I caught a few, but very gingerly, very tentatively. For me it was a process. It wasn't like you go out, you catch one wave and that's it, you've conquered your fears. It took a few years to find my footing.

It wasn't until I spent an entire season on the North Shore in 1974 that I really found my confidence. That was when I was 19. I do remember paddling out that season and a guy saying to me, "Better not drop in on me or you're going home in a box." I also had what turned out to be a really great board made by my shaper in South Africa, Spider Murphy. I rode that board for five winters and during those five winters I was surfing Pipeline as hard and as radically as it can be surfed and I never, ever lost it on take-off, not once. That board was magic. The last time I surfed Pipeline was in 2005 and the last wave was about a 10-foot wave at Backdoor, I was deep in this barrel, thinking man, I've got this made, it's like 1977 all over again. Next thing I was on my back, on the reef, with my board smashing into me so hard that I saw stars and broke my nose open. I had two black eyes and a broken nose and that's the last time I'll ever surf there. It's for the young and aggro.

JAMIE  
O'BRIEN

*North Shore local who won the Pipe Masters in 2004.*

I think I was about seven and my dad was like, now's the time. He bought a helmet for me to make sure I was extra safe.

It was small surf so I wouldn't say it was real-deal Pipeline, but when you're seven years old, it was real-deal Pipeline. But then, when I was a little older, me and Mark Healey and a couple guys went out when it was like, oh, shit, this is the real-deal Pipeline. I think I was 11 or 12. It was the first big day that any of us had been out there. We weren't sure if we were supposed to be out there or not. The lifeguards didn't really say anything. I just remember we were all real scared, real timid, not knowing the right or wrong things to do in the lineup. I remember getting really pounded that day. Johnny-Boy Gomes told me to go on this wave and I broke my board in three pieces and I was just really discouraged and not sure if I liked it. It was pretty crazy. I just remember Johnny-Boy telling me, "Go! Go!" and I think at the end of the day what I realized is that it wasn't a very good wave. Everything was just a giant learning curve when you're a little kid. I'm still learning out there and I've been surfing Pipe for 20–25 years. So we just went out there and got rag-dolled and at the end of the day we all re-checked ourselves and that was kind of our turning point to be men.

**IT ALWAYS STUCK IN MY CONSCIOUSNESS THAT IF YOU MAKE A MISTAKE THERE, IT COULD KILL YOU.**

SHAUN TOMSON

GABRIEL  
MEDINA

**First Brazilian surfer to win a world championship, in 2014.**

I was 13. When you're a young boy like I was, you constantly dream of surfing Pipeline. I saw it in magazines, and I also saw my idols surfing that wave. So it was always my desire to surf there. I was thrilled and afraid at the same time. It's a dangerous wave and any kind of mistake could be fateful. But I went there confident. I went with Miguel (Pupo, another Brazilian surfer). It was his fifth season already and [he] knew exactly how it worked. I remember there was a lot of surfers in the spot. I didn't know anybody. I just surfed by myself. The first time I competed was in 2011. I was cautious, because it wasn't the kind of wave I wanted to risk it all. I've fallen in many waves, I've taken a lot of wipeouts, but nothing serious. Not yet. I've been learning over time. This year my goal is to win Pipe. In fact, this is a particular desire of mine. Two years in a row I almost did it. I hope it comes this year, otherwise, I'll keep working on it.



GABRIEL MEDINA.  
PHOTO: IGM/FABIO MARADEI

KELLY  
SLATER

**American who won the Pipe Masters seven times and world championship 11 times.**

[At age 10 Kelly was transfixed by a poster showing a surfer taking Pipeline's steep drop.] It was on a friend's wall in Cocoa Beach [Fla.]. It was probably a 15 to 20 foot face with a strong offshore wind. It seemed like a wave so far removed from the reality I grew up in with tiny waves that I couldn't imagine seeing a wave like that let alone riding it. I knew if I ever were to be where I wanted to be in surfing that I'd have to learn how to ride waves like that. I couldn't wrap my head around that at 10 years old but I figured if other people could do it I could figure it out.

[At age 12 Kelly decided to give the wave a try during a trip to Hawaii.] It was really too small to be considered proper Pipeline. But I got caught inside at Backdoor and tried to duck dive a wave that broke right in front of me. It was probably only about a 6-foot face but it picked me up and pinned me on my back flat against the reef while I clung to my board. I didn't suffer any physical damage but it seemed like a nice little message to send me back to my sandbox for a while longer where the waves were a bit smaller. I don't think I tried to surf Backdoor again for two more years. Pretty funny looking back now. I gradually eased into it til I was about 17 and then really started to try and ride bigger and bigger waves consistently at that point. The thing to understand also is that the dangerous spots at Pipe and Backdoor are pretty concentrated in certain areas and you can learn to avoid those while you're not riding waves or when a big set comes that you don't want. It's a small playing field compared to a lot of waves so you easily get in and out of the pocket so to speak. I spent a lot of time watching guys like Dane Kealoha and Johnny-Boy Gomes and

**IT PICKED ME UP AND PINNED ME ON MY BACK FLAT AGAINST THE REEF WHILE I CLUNG TO MY BOARD.**

KELLY SLATER

Ronnie Burns. Tom Carroll and Derek Ho also. All the guys who were great out there. Marvin Foster also. Anyone who charged and walked away seemed like a good guy to pay attention to.

[At 18 he decided to paddle out on bigger boards so he could get more practice waves.] Bigger boards make the takeoff easier. When you can catch it from outside it just settles your nerves a bit. It makes riding the wave a bit less of a performance but builds confidence just being able to catch a few. Eventually at any lineup if you put yourself there enough and everyone is familiar with you you're gonna get some of the best waves. It's really just taking the time to pay your dues.

[He gained more confidence in 1990 when he emerged unscathed from a wipeout that tossed him over Pipeline's lip.] You can have a terrible situation on a small wave and an easy one on a big wave. You never know til you go and then you just deal with it. ▲

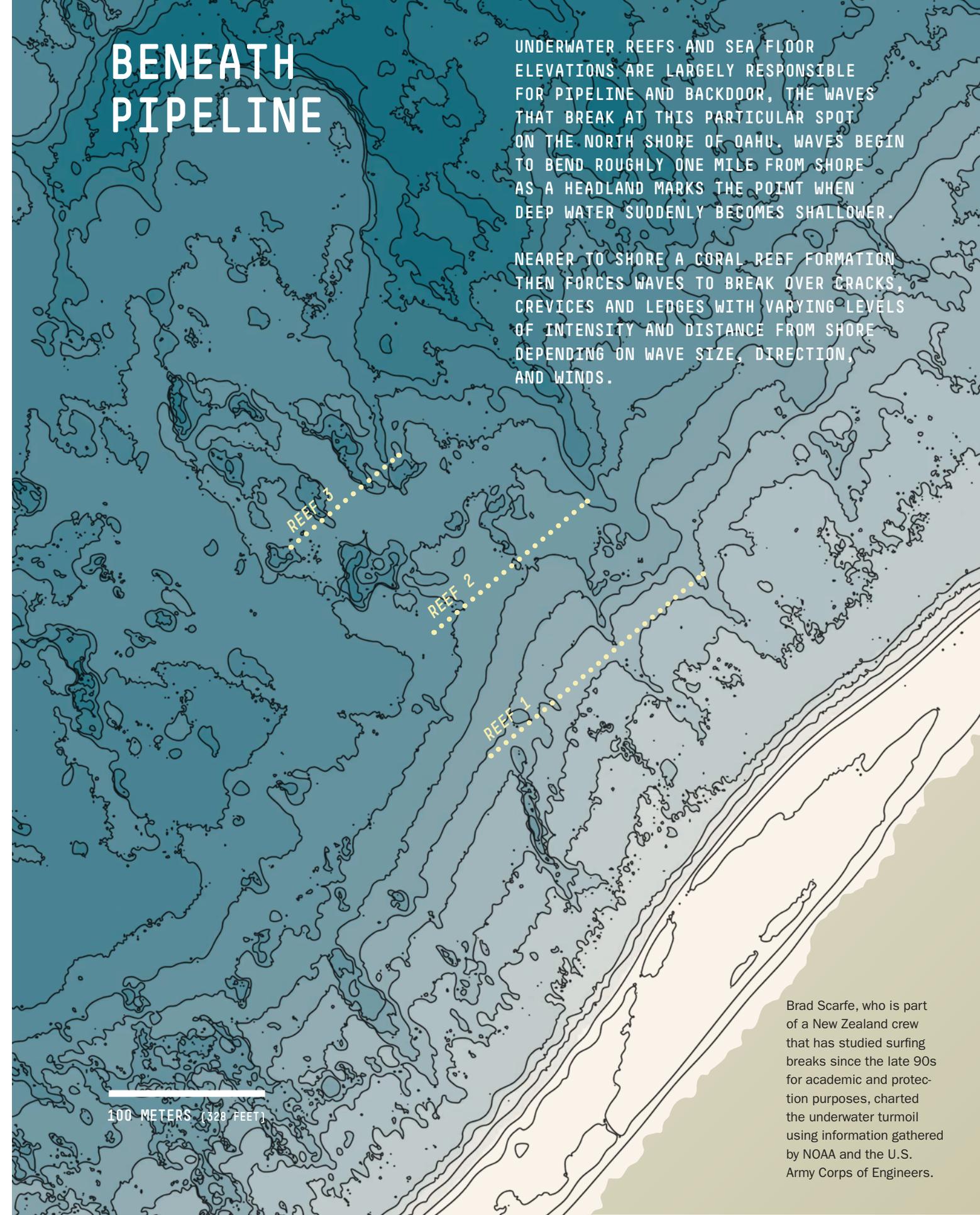


KELLY SLATER AGE 18. PHOTO: BODY GLOVE

# BENEATH PIPELINE

UNDERWATER REEFS AND SEA FLOOR ELEVATIONS ARE LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR PIPELINE AND BACKDOOR, THE WAVES THAT BREAK AT THIS PARTICULAR SPOT ON THE NORTH SHORE OF OAHU. WAVES BEGIN TO BEND ROUGHLY ONE MILE FROM SHORE AS A HEADLAND MARKS THE POINT WHEN DEEP WATER SUDDENLY BECOMES SHALLOWER.

NEARER TO SHORE A CORAL REEF FORMATION THEN FORCES WAVES TO BREAK OVER CRACKS, CREVICES AND LEDGES WITH VARYING LEVELS OF INTENSITY AND DISTANCE FROM SHORE DEPENDING ON WAVE SIZE, DIRECTION, AND WINDS.



Brad Scarfe, who is part of a New Zealand crew that has studied surfing breaks since the late 90s for academic and protection purposes, charted the underwater turmoil using information gathered by NOAA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

A photograph of Warren Harlow, an elderly man with a white beard and glasses, wearing a teal patterned shirt. He is standing on a porch with a view of the ocean and trees in the background. The word "SEEING" is written in large, white, outlined letters across the top left, with "RED" in smaller, red, outlined letters below it.

# SEEING RED

FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY WARREN HARLOW HAS BEEN WATCHING PIPELINE FROM HIS FRONT PORCH, OFFERING HIM A RARE VIEW OF THE WAVE'S POTENTIAL FOR EXTREME VIOLENCE. By Alex Roth

The surfer with the cracked skull is an image that remains vivid in Warren Harlow's mind, even after all these years. At first, it looked like the guy was bobbing in the water next to a red fishing net until Harlow realized the red was blood.

From the deck of his property, which overlooks Pipeline, one of the world's most ferocious waves, Harlow dashed into the ocean and dragged the man to shore. His head injury was horrific. His girlfriend was going berserk. An ambulance rushed him to the hospital, where doctors saved his life and put a metal plate in his skull.

*"In those days there were no lifeguards out here... So unless you wanted to turn a blind eye, you had to kind of be one occasionally."*

"In those days there were no lifeguards out here," said Harlow, who is now 82 years old. "So unless you wanted to turn a blind eye, you had to kind of be one occasionally."

Harlow has been living for 52 years in the same house on Ke Nui Road on Hawaii's North Shore, stockpiling memories of surfers brave or foolish enough to challenge Pipeline's terrifying power. His property abuts the sand, with a porch overlooking a violent surf zone that can produce waves with 15-foot faces that break in shallow water on a coral reef. On really big days, the foundation of his house sometimes vibrates.

He remembers body-surfing Pipeline alongside the legendary surfer Gerry Lopez at a time when the wave was so uncrowded that bodysurfers and board riders could co-exist without conflict. He has stories about a young Laird Hamilton, who as a 5-year-old would venture into the churning ocean by tying a rope to his leg and attaching the other end to a concrete slab on the beach.

The neighborhood has changed since the early 1960s, of course. These days Harlow has a hard time keeping track of which corporate sponsor owns which of the nearby beach houses, or which house is hosting which party during the World Surf League's famous Pipe Masters competition.

"I'm a little out of the loop in terms of getting invited to any of them," he says.

Harlow, who grew up in Manhattan Beach, Calif., was a civil engineer for the Navy at Pearl Harbor when he first moved to the North Shore specifically for the surf. In 1963 he and his wife, Colleen, bought what was then an empty



Warren Harlow stands in front of his house facing Pipeline. He and his wife in 1963 paid \$8,500 for what was then an empty lot on Ke Nui Road.

lot on Ke Nui Road, paying \$8,500 for the 6,000-square-foot piece of oceanfront property. (Next door to Harlow's place is a 13,000-square-foot lot, including a 3-bedroom house and 2-bedroom cottage, that is currently on the market for \$20 million.)

They finished building their house in 1964 and have been living there ever since. They've been married 63 years.

Back in the day, most of their neighbors were enlisted personnel stationed at Schofield Barracks, a nearby Army installation, or weekend visitors from Honolulu. Few of them surfed. Most of Harlow's pals lived inland and he'd routinely field calls from buddies looking for a surf report.

One friend would call fairly frequently. If Harlow wasn't home, the guy would pepper Harlow's wife with questions about what the ocean looked like. "He would couch his questions about surf size by asking her, 'Well, how many refrigerators high is it?'" he recalled.

Even before settling into his new house, Harlow had earned a reputation on the North Shore as a big-wave charger and waterman. He remembers the first time he summoned the guts to paddle out in really big Pipeline surf. He caught an outside wave, probably in the 12- to 15-foot range.

"It was a really low slope, I was barely riding it, then all of a sudden it's getting really, really steep," he said. "As I approached the inside break, I eventually bailed out to keep from going over the falls and dying or whatever else might happen to me. But that was my first experience in really big Pipeline. And I never tried to ride the outside break again after that. It was a little too terrifying for me."

He preferred other spots, such as Sunset and Pupukea. He dropped in on some giant waves at Waimea Bay.

He was content, on huge days at Pipeline, to stay on the beach, witnessing the exploits of barrel-riding pioneers such as Greg Noll, Butch Van Artsdalen and Lopez, who lived down the beach.

He and his wife befriended a couple named the Hamiltons, who lived a few houses away. Sometimes they'd babysit the couple's son Laird, who had a habit of engaging in all sorts of wild stunts and crazy pranks. One time, Lopez wiped out on a Pipeline wave, then spent hours searching the beach for his board before discovering that Laird had buried it in the sand.

Because there were no lifeguards when Harlow first moved to the North Shore, he found himself occasionally sprinting down from his deck and plunging into the surf to rescue someone in trouble. He figures he's aided in a half-dozen rescues over the years.

Many years ago, he took a CPR class and almost immediately was faced with the task of using CPR. At dawn one morning, a kid came racing to his house looking for someone to help a surfer who lay unconscious and unresponsive on the beach. Harlow rushed to the man's aid.

"I remember my mind going completely blank when I was confronted with the need to apply my newfound knowledge," he said. "But fortunately for him, all I did was turn him over and as I was trying to figure out what I was supposed to do first, he started sputtering and spitting up water and he came out of it pretty well."



A 3,000-square-foot house built by famed Pipeline surfer Gerry Lopez sits several doors down from Warren Harlow's place. It is now owned by Volcom, a surf apparel company. Note the Volcom "stone" logo affixed to the upper level porch. Photos: Elyse Butler.

These days Harlow is less physically active than in his younger days, when his hobbies including windsurfing, sailing, cycling, scuba diving and competing in Ironman competitions. He hardly ever surfs or bodysurfs anymore but still swims in the ocean during the calm summer months.

He retired from his engineering job at Pearl Harbor in 1994. Since then, he's seen some of the kids in the neighborhood grow up to become famous, including the folk/pop singer Jack Johnson, whose parents lived down the beach, and the pro surfer Jamie O'Brien, who grew up in the house next door.

## GERRY'S HOUSE

A short walk along the beach will take you to what may be the most important address in surfing: 59-363 Ke Nui Road. Its occupants still refer to it as "Gerry's House" as a sign of respect for the man who built it. Gerry Lopez was a surfer from Honolulu who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s and earned the nickname "Mr. Pipeline" for his graceful approach to Pipeline's perils. Lopez put up this house 38 years ago with help from partners "Fat Paul" Peterson and Herbie Fletcher, according to Volcom's David Riddle. Volcom, a surf apparel company, purchased the 4-bedroom, 5-bath home in 2007. Through the decades the house has served as Pipeline headquarters for a string of athletes well known for their mastery of that difficult wave: Andy and Bruce Irons, Mike and Derek Ho, Sunny Garcia, Dane Kealoha, Martin Potter and Tom Carroll. Volcom also owns a one-story bungalow next door that in the early 1990s acted as base camp for a young Kelly Slater and many of his contemporaries.

— Dan Fitzpatrick

He admits to getting annoyed every so often by the big parties, the crowds, the noise and the traffic, all of which are now unavoidable at Pipeline, especially during surfing contests and big swells.

But he'll assure you there's not a whole lot to complain about in his little corner of paradise.

"You just kind of roll with the punches," he says.

Some years he watches the Pipe Masters competition, some years he doesn't. As with the daily routines of so many people living on the North Shore, everything depends on how good the surf happens to be. ♦



The view of Pipeline inside the Volcom house. Photo: Tai Vandyke/Volcom



ILLUSTRATED MAP: NEIL FITZPATRICK

## BEYOND PIPE

Surfing Pipeline is for experts only, said Hawaiian Water Patrol's Brian Keaulana. It's "like skiing down Mount Everest." So *where should the rest of us go?* Keaulana and Patrick Caldwell, surf forecaster for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, offer advice on spots more appropriate for beginners or first-time visitors to Oahu. Even these spots are not without their risks.



### WAIKIKI

We tell people if you are learning go and learn at Waikiki," Keaulana said. The gentler slope of the sea floor here makes the wave "spill" more than "plunge," Caldwell said, making for a softer experience.

**Risks:** Large crowds and collisions in the water.



### KAILUA BEACH

Has an outer reef that slows incoming swells.

**Risks:** Breaks in shallow water close to shore.

### WAIMANALO BEACH

Has an outer reef about a mile from shore that breaks up the energy of any approaching swell.

**Risks:** Breaks in shallow water close to shore.



### HALEIWA

This break is protected from the most powerful swells, is fairly close to shore and has a sandy entrance. The wave goes both left and right.

**Risks:** When it gets bigger there is a strong current and it does have a reef. Stay close to shore, where bigger waves become smaller.



### CHUN'S REEF

Has a sandy entrance and can be an easy wave if the conditions are right.

**Risk:** Rocks under the water near shore.



### MALAEKAHANA

Long white sand beach with waves that break in front of a campground.

**Risks:** Reef.



During the final months of 1991 Tom Servais captured two images that remain the best known Pipeline photos ever taken. One, of Australian Tom Carroll, came during the height of pro competition with hundreds watching. The other, of American Tom Curren, unfolded in the fading light of afternoon with few people around.

Servais explains the circumstances surrounding the images and why they still resonate with surfers a quarter century later. Servais, now 63, is at Pipeline this December for the 35th time, in search of more such moments.

Photos by Tom Servais. Interviews by Dan Fitzpatrick.



## THE MOMENT

### November 1991

Tom Curren, from Santa Barbara, decides to surf one November afternoon in 1991. He catches a wave at Backdoor, the name given to the section of Pipeline breaking from left to right, and cuts back in the direction he had been traveling.

## THE SURFER

Tom is one of the most stylish, smoothest surfers ever. His body parts are doing exactly what they need to do without any arm waving or any theatrics of any kind. It all seemed to come together in that photo. He was kind of shy. Trying to get photos of him was hard because you never knew when he would show up. He might go surfing one hour before dark and the light was getting bad. He tried to avoid the cameras.

## THE BOARD

He was riding a board without any logos on it which also made it super cool. The board he is riding is called a Reverse V. He had two of those surfboards, one was 7'3" and one was a 7'8". They were Maurice Cole surfboards. Maurice Cole is an Australian shaper. He lived in France for lot of years. Tom Curren's first wife was from France and Maurice Cole was living there at the same time. I believe that's how that union started.

## THE SET UP

In the morning it was one of those days they call 6 to 8 foot, which is pretty big surf for Hawaii. It started getting windy and everybody left and it seemed like it was done. I remember taking a drive up to another surf spot called Haleiwa that is real good on west swell. It wasn't very good. A couple hours later on the way back to North Shore I stopped at Backdoor and had another look at it. It was 3:30 or 4 o'clock. The conditions were good so I just grabbed my stuff and ran down and set up. It wasn't like I went down to the beach with Tom Curren and said hey let's go shoot. I just happened to go down there and he just happened to be there.

## THE CAMERA

I shot with Canon cameras. Nikon had come out with this 600 millimeter lens that everyone thought was a really good lens. I had an adapter that made it sit on my Canon. I was shooting Kodachrome 200 film because I liked how it looked in backlit conditions. It was a manual focused lens and manual exposure. With digital you have a lot more latitude and you can look at the photo on the back of the camera and can take test shots. Back in the film days it was experience and a little guess work.

## THE RIDE

It's not that unusual for [surfers] to come out of a tube and see a nice shoulder and do a turn like that. As a photographer we always liked it when they finished off the wave with a dramatic maneuver. The first thing I remember about that photo is not so much shooting it but when I got the slides back and I opened up the box and I was looking through it and I saw that photo and I said "wow that looks really good." A couple other photographer friends were there. I could tell they thought it was special too. A lot of surfers have said that was the most beautiful cutback ever done. His style is perfect, the turn is perfect and it's smooth. It's just a lucky moment in time.

## THE AFTERMATH

There were a couple people who got that photo. One of them was out of focus. Another guy had a different angle down the beach. It was never on the cover of Surfer magazine at the time. It would be except the magazine did not want to upset the advertiser. His main sponsor at the time was [Ocean Pacific] and without logos on the board they thought if we put this on the cover we will piss off the sponsors. This photo just seems to have gathered more and more momentum as time has gone on. There is no photo of mine that has gotten more attention. Just a couple years ago I finally saw a video of the ride. It's over in three to four seconds and the turn at the end happened so fast. I feel super lucky I got that photo.

### THE SURFER

I had already been friends with [Tom Carroll] at that point. I had met him in the early 80s. Surfer magazine always got a house on the North Shore and he happened to be staying in the house next door to us. He is just the most polite, nicest guy and very sincere and I was always drawn to that. We all wanted to shoot photos of Tommy Carroll. He was like the Kelly Slater of his time. He was just a fantastic surfer and he was very photogenic and he was very good on the North Shore of Hawaii which is the real proving ground for surfers because the waves are so thick and powerful and challenging. He wore a helmet because he hit his head on the bottom. He just felt like 'I value my brains.' It's very shallow and people have died surfing out there.

### THE BOARD

It was one of his favorite boards, shaped by a famous North Shore shaper named Pat Rawson.

### THE SET UP

You can pretty much shoot anywhere you want on the beach at Pipeline as long as you don't sit in front of someone who wants to kill you if you do. I like to be in front during a contest. I get down to the beach at 6 a.m. or so. It's not my style to show up on beach late and just go 'hey I'm a photographer man I am going to set up in front of you, sorry to block your view.' I was one of the first people down on the beach for sure. Pipe Masters only runs for three or four days every winter and all of the best surfers are there. The day of the Super Bowl the photographers don't show up late.

### THE CAMERA

I had a Canon camera. It was more than likely the very same camera [responsible for the Tom Curren photo] with the manual focused lens. We didn't have auto focus yet. Everything was manually focused.

### THE RIDE

I remember that maneuver very clearly. He did a very hard turn in a very vertical, critical spot on the wave. When he did that turn the whole beach was like 'oh my god did you see that turn?' A lot of surfers would try to do a turn in that part of the wave and they would fall off and lose control. They used to have a nickname for it: they called it The Snap. It was more than a snap; it was a big power turn but people refer to it as The Snap. We all knew it was something great.

### THE AFTERMATH

I would never say I have the best version of that photo. I know of two to three other versions. Jeff Divine shot it, another guy from Australia named Peter Wilson, nicknamed Joli, he has a version of it. That photo to me is more about that turn than the actual photo. I am glad I have that photo and it's a historical photo but not so much a historical photo as it was a historical surfing maneuver by Tom Carroll. That one turn is the most explicit example of his type of surfing at Pipeline. He did turns at Pipeline no one else has ever done.



### THE MOMENT

#### Pipe Masters semifinal, December 1991

Tom Carroll, from Sydney, Australia, takes off on a 10 to 12-foot wave moving right to left. His board is pink and his helmet is black. Instead of riding Pipeline's tube horizontally, as most surfers do, Carroll snapped his board and turned along Pipeline's formidable wall of water.



# A RIVALRY IN THE MAKING

John John Florence and Gabriel Medina turned pro the same year. Now each has a world title, and neither is older than 25. Those who follow pro surfing expect the rivalry between the Hawaiian and the Brazilian to define pro surfing over the next decade. The next chance to watch them compete will be the Billabong Pipe Masters, starting December 8 at [worldsurfleague.com](http://worldsurfleague.com). Here is how the two stack up.

## JOHN JOHN FLORENCE

Age: 24

Height: 6'1"

Weight: 167 lbs

First year on pro tour: 2011

World Titles: 1

2016 earnings: \$389,500\*\*

Career winnings: \$1.6 million\*\*

Hometown: North Shore of Oahu,  
Hawaii

Head to head wins against Medina: 4

\* turns 23 on Dec. 22

\*\* before the Billabong  
Pipe Masters, Dec. 8-20

Source: World Surf League

ILLUSTRATION: YU-MING HUANG

## GABRIEL MEDINA

Age: 22\*

Height: 5'11"

Weight: 176 lbs

First year on pro tour: 2011

World Titles: 1

2016 earnings: \$271,250\*\*

Career winnings: \$1.8 million\*\*

Hometown: Maresias, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Head to head wins against Florence: 10

ILLUSTRATION: ALVAR SIRLIN



## THE PORTUGUESE PIPELINE

Those in the surfing world expected the 2016 world title race to conclude at Pipeline, a wave on the North Shore of Oahu that breaks in John John Florence's backyard. Instead Florence was able to clinch his first crown more than 7,000 miles away, in southwest Europe. It happened on a Portuguese wave named "Supertubos" that produces Pipeline-sized tubes and breaks close to the beach, just as Pipeline does. Portuguese photographer Ricardo Santos Luis was there in the port town of Peniche to witness what happened.

**Photos by Ricardo Santos Luis**  
**Quotes are from interviews conducted by the World Surf League**



Florence contemplates Supertubos in a yellow jersey, uniform for the No. 1 ranked surfer in the world. "My dream is to win the world title so I'm going to do everything I can to do it."



Florence was long considered the most talented surfer in the world, a rare combination of power, creativity and flexibility. But since turning pro in 2011 a world title had eluded the Hawaiian.



Winning the world title in pro surfing is a matter of compiling more points over the course of 11 events, a task that rewards consistency as much as skill. Before Portugal, the tenth event of the year, roughly 2,700 points separated Florence and Gabriel Medina of Brazil. A first place finish meant 10,000 points and a clear path to the trophy.

Florence took a more tactical approach to the tour this year and paid close attention to contest strategy. So he was ready in Portugal when Medina lost in the third round, giving Florence a mathematical chance to win it all before heading home to Hawaii. He clinched the title during the semifinals of the event.



"I HAVE WORKED MY WHOLE LIFE TOWARDS THIS."



His supporters carried Florence down the beach after he won, a tradition in the surfing world, and Florence hoisted the Hawaiian flag. He is the first from that state to win the title since Andy Irons in 2004 and the fourth ever. The last American to win the title was 11-time world champion Kelly Slater, in 2011.

## THE POP UP

Getting to your feet is the most basic maneuver in surfing yet for many beginners it can feel like an insurmountable obstacle. We asked Adam Dufner, an instructor affiliated with the Hurley Surf Club and Skudin Surf, for a tutorial. He suggested that anyone who is new to surfing follow these steps with a longer, more stable board.

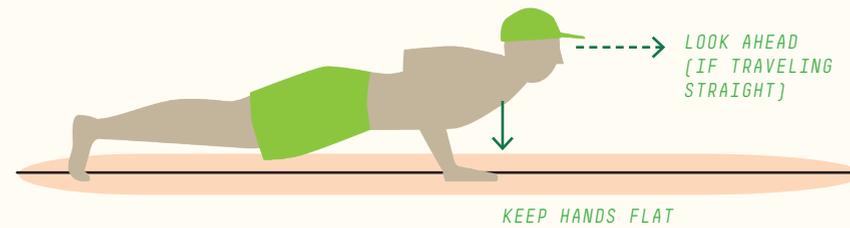
### POSITION YOURSELF.

First look where you want to go – either straight ahead or at an angle if you plan to ride down the line, along the face of the wave.

**Don't look down.** This is the moment when you must commit to the wave and avoid any hesitation.

Place weight on your chest to make sure you have the momentum to catch the wave.

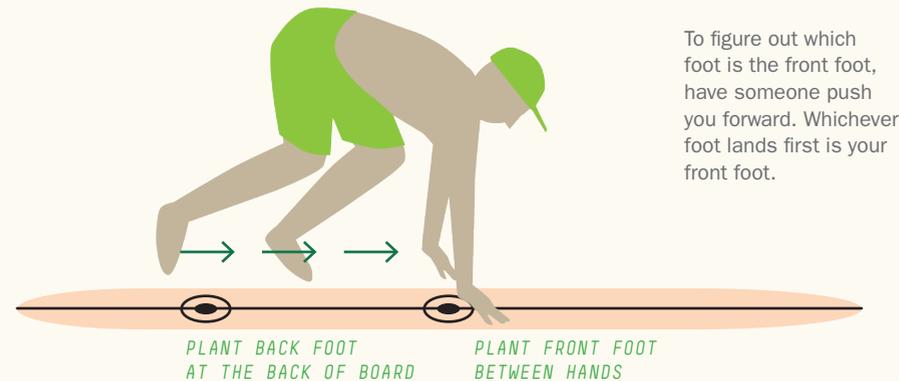
Place your hands just under your chest and keep them flat, facing forward. **Don't grab the sides of your board.**



### SWEEP YOUR FEET.

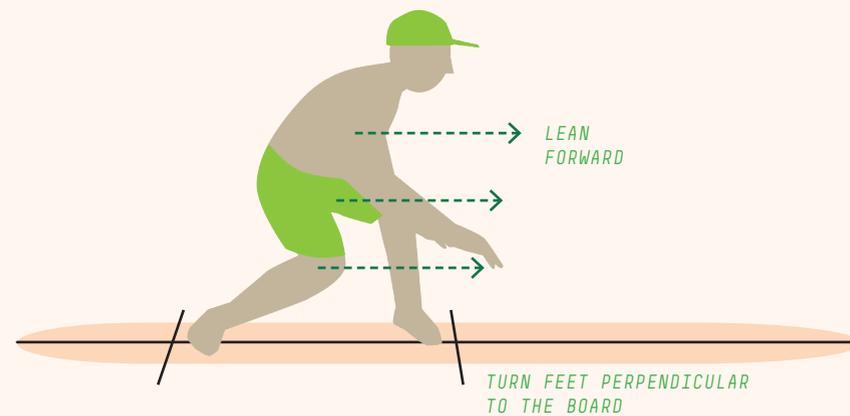
Sweep your feet under your hips and place your front foot between your hands, turning your toes inward.

Plant your back foot near the rear of the board. Your feet should now be perpendicular to the stringer, which is the line that runs down the center.



### SHIFT YOUR BODY WEIGHT.

Lean forward once you are on your feet, even if that feels counter-intuitive. Many beginners make the mistake of leaning back, a move that typically will separate you from your board. Forward momentum is your friend.



You can learn more about the Hurley Surf Club, which provides coaching and video analysis for surfers around the world, at [www.hurley.com](http://www.hurley.com). Skudin Surf is based in Long Beach, N.Y., and you can find more information at [www.skudinsurf.com](http://www.skudinsurf.com).

## PICKING THE PROPER WETSUIT

WATER TEMPERATURE

60-70°F

50-64°F

40-54°F

<40°F

NEOPRENE THICKNESS (millimeters)

2-2

3-2

4-3

5-4-3

6-5-4

MORE FLEXIBLE

MORE INSULATED

Knowing what wetsuit is appropriate for certain conditions can be confusing for anyone, especially beginners. So we asked Body Glove, which made its first wetsuit in 1953 using neoprene, an insulating material found in the back of refrigerators, to walk us through the basics. Wetsuit designer John Federoff was our guide.

**Why do wetsuits have a set of numbers attached to them. What do they mean?**

Each wetsuit has either two or three numerals that indicate how thick the layer of neoprene is, ranging from one to six millimeters. The larger number refers to the “core” part of the suit – meaning the torso and legs. The smaller number refers to portions of the suit where flexibility is needed most – sleeves and gussets. A “4-3” wetsuit, for example, has four millimeters of neoprene around the chest and three millimeters throughout the sleeves. Wetsuits for the coldest conditions have three numerals, in which case the third refers to the hood or wrist seals. Maximum thickness is typically six millimeters, needed for water below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. That “will afford someone at least an hour or two in the lineup,” Federoff says. “Of course each person is different and a tolerance for cold can vary greatly.”

These dimensions are based on Body Glove's lineup of Prime, Red Cell and Voodoo wetsuits.

**What does more thickness give you? What does it take away?**

Thicker suits can inhibit motion and adversely affect performance. But they provide more insulation.

**At what water temperature do you no longer need a wetsuit?**

“It's always a good idea to select a suit that will provide you with some measure of warmth but not cause you to overheat in warm or tropical conditions of 70 degrees and above.” Wetsuits for the warmest conditions are only two millimeters thick and typically leave portions of the arms and legs exposed.

**Some wetsuits zip up in front and some in the back. Why?**

Both have trade offs. Chest zip suits can be more flexible and do a better job of keeping excess water out. But they are tricky to enter. Those that zip up in the back are easier for most people to enter but they allow more water inside. Surfers may also encounter reduced mobility with a zipper running along their spine. Federoff recommends that anyone buying a back zip suit select one that has an internal gasket, the panel that provides an extra layer of cushion along the back and reduces water inflow.

**How tightly are wetsuits supposed to fit?**

“A proper fitting wetsuit should fit close and snug to the body but not so tight that it restricts the wearer's movement and impedes breathing,” Federoff says.



# The Hazards of Hawaii



ILLUSTRATION: XIAO HUA YANG

IF YOU TRAVEL TO HAWAII IN SEARCH OF SURF THERE IS A LOT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO. WE ASKED BRIAN KEAULANA OF HAWAIIAN WATER PATROL TO IDENTIFY COMMON HAZARDS THAT FIRST TIMERS OVERLOOK. VISITORS, HE SAID, FREQUENTLY UNDERESTIMATE HAWAII'S DANGERS.

### 1. Plunging waves

Waves come in two varieties: spillers and plungers. The second is considerably more dangerous because the upper portion of the wave hurls forward as it breaks. These waves occur when deep water becomes shallow quickly, and that turbulence can cause a number of injuries. Pipeline is an extreme example of a plunger. "That's what makes it so beautiful – the dangers."

### 2. Shallow Water

What most beginners do not realize is that waves break in water of a similar depth. So when the force of a three foot wave unfurls, it does so in just three feet of water. The lip of the wave can throw you against the ocean floor, which can cause serious spinal injuries if you land head first. "Most incidents happen when waves are under three feet."

### 3. Coral Reef

Just several feet below the surface at Pipeline and other Hawaiian waves lies a rocky mass formed by lava and the animal known as coral. This reef – which can be flat, sharp or cavernous – is a deadly landing spot for surfers driven below the water by the force of the wave.

### 4. Sharks

Most shark attacks happen in October as fish come closer to shore to give birth and feed. Heavier rains in the fall wash dead animals down from the mountains and sharks like to feed on those carcasses. Keaulana advises surfers to stay away from river mouths or harbor entrances, popular gathering spots for sharks. "The ocean is not a swimming pool," he said. "When it rains and it's murky we don't go out."

### 5. Unpredictable Currents

"Our currents are real brutal if you don't know what you are doing. A guy went out nighttime diving. He wasn't that far out. Once you get into the current lines just offshore you can get sucked out to sea. We searched for him. On the fourth day we found his body 100 miles away."

*"People are coming here to fulfill their fantasies and dreams and escape reality of everyday life. The warm weather, blue skies and rainbows. They see the beauty but don't see the beast within the beauty."*

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THE MOMENT YOU REALIZE SOMEONE UP ABOVE IS WATCHING...  
AND IT'S 11-TIME WORLD CHAMPION KELLY SLATER.

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PHOTO: RICARDO SANTOS LUIS