

OCC Surfers Challenge the Waves in Costa Rica

By Rob Farrow

On May 4-11, the Rabbit Kekai "Toes on the Nose" Longboard Classic was held at Playa Boca Baranca in Costa Rica. Outrigger Canoe Club had two representatives attend the event, which is billed as the world's largest longboard event. Our surfers were Loch Eggers and Rob Farrow.

The sport of longboard surfing has fast been growing in popularity due to its ability to bridge the generation gap in the sport and the positive camaraderie in the events. Costa Rica was a prime example, drawing several hundred contestants and supporters to one of the most amazing surf spots on the face of the earth.

The contest took place at Playa Boca Baranca which is situated on the outskirts of Punteranus about one hour and forty minutes west of San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica. We arrived at the airport, flew through customs, walked outside and were immediately greeted by a representative from Economy rent a car who took us and a massive amount of equipment to their main office, got us situated, and on the road in about 20 minutes.

The entire country, outside of San Jose, has about two main roads so getting lost is almost impossible. As we drove through some of the most beautiful mountains and valleys, it was like walking back in time to how Hawaii looked probably 50 or so years ago.

As we drove, we stopped at a few road side vendors to get sodas or food. Everywhere we stopped, the locals or "Ticos" as they are referred to, treated us so nicely and were very friendly. It was a very comforting feeling and would become the norm on the entire trip.

When we arrived at the Fiesta Hotel, we were blown away to find this modern luxury western style resort in the middle of Central America. The hotel is situated on the ocean with every amenity imaginable, three pools with wet bars, Jacuzzi, dining hall and unfortunately a casino.

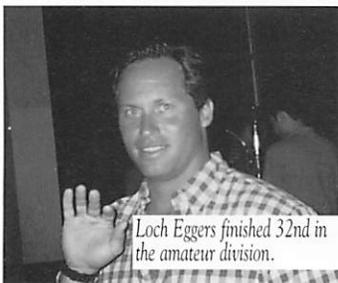
The casino was the meeting place for everyone and was probably responsible for removing quite a few dollars from our pockets each and every night, but boy was it fun.

The contest was held directly in front of the hotel at a left breaking point called Boca Baranca. To give you an idea of the layout of the place, it is a bay. The hotel is located on the north side of the bay, the south side has a river mouth with a cliff-like point that jets out. The beach is black sand and runs the length of the entire bay. At low tide, the water line recedes almost 12 feet, so at low tide the sand bar is exposed. The waves become almost machine like.

The wave itself is almost beyond definition. It is billed as the fourth longest wave in the world. It breaks the entire length of the bay about 900-1,100 yards without interruption. The average ride is about two and a half minutes. That's like taking off at Rice Bowls and kicking out on the sand at the beach desk.

When we were there, the Ticos told us it was flat. It was about head high and breaking half the bay. I have traveled and surfed many places around the world, and this "flat" day in Costa Rica ranked in the top 10 best waves.

The contest began on Wednesday and ended on Friday. We were greeted with a small swell which made for some great performances in the water. The professional division was held first. It was an ASP (Association of Surfing Professionals) rated event with a \$10,000 purse. The trials hit the water first, all the surfers hoping to get a berth in the main event to surf against the top pro surfers in the world and a shot at the purse. Many of the Hawaiians at the contest fared well in this division but



Loch Eggers finished 32nd in the amateur division.

the finals were dominated by the three Californians and one Brazilian.

On the amateur side of the event, the Hawaiians fared much better with finalists in every division. The contest went off without a hitch and almost every competitor was very pleased with the event. Contest organizer Hank Raymond did a super job along with his assistants Allen Mitchell and Henry Ford who handled every aspect of the event.

After the event, we had the awards ceremony and were treated to an awesome dinner at the hotel's main dining area. The drinks flowed, the stories got more outrageous and the Cuban cigars were passed around.

By midnight the casino was over run by vibrant aloha shirts on cigar toting surfers gambling the night away. In the wee hours of the morning, we got out of the pool and headed for our rooms to get some rest for the next day's excursion.

The following day, four of us went on a three and a half hour journey north through the mountains and across the bay to Tamarindo. From Tamarindo you can access the famous "Witches Rock" surf spot by hiring one of the many water taxi's for the day. There are many surfing areas in this region as well as many beautiful resorts.

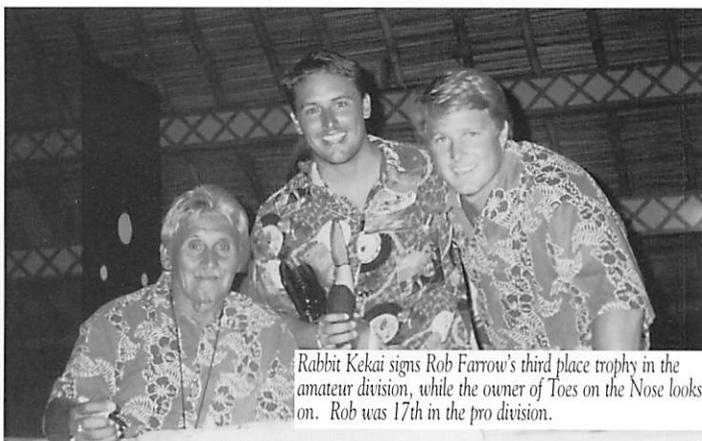
Two resorts I would definitely recommend are El Diablo Surf Camp for the single surfing guys and Villa Bualla for couples. Both are directly on the beach and offer

awesome accommodations. They can be accessed via the internet or through your travel agent.

While in Tamarindo we decided to surf a spot known as Playa Langusta, which is situated on the mouth of a large estuary that is protected by the Costa Rican government as a wildlife preserve. The owner of Villa Bualla arranged for a water taxi to transport us across the estuary and offered to watch our car for us while we surfed. We waited about 20 minutes for the boat and then opted to paddle across on our boards. It seemed like an easy alternative. After surfing for two hours or so we paddled back across and made our way back to the car through the kiawe forest and iguanas.

When we got to our car the owner of the resort came out and asked what had happened to us. We explained that we paddled across after waiting for several minutes and thanked him for his help. He then informed us that we had just successfully crossed the single most crocodile infested water way in the entire country. Then he informed us we were also fortunate because the piranhas were very mild this season (a comforting thought). Needless to say we made it back to the hotel relatively unscathed, with some great stories for the bar.

The entire trip was a success with great new friends, great experiences, awesome surf, amazing wild life and a really enjoyable contest to tie it all together. If you have the urge to travel and enjoy tropical settings, Costa Rica is a winner. ☺



Rabbit Kekai signs Rob Farrow's third place trophy in the amateur division, while the owner of Toes on the Nose looks on. Rob was 17th in the pro division.