

The Legendary Makaha Waves

By Fred Hemmings, Jr.

There is no place in the world like Makaha when it is right. Over the years the emphasis in surfing has focused on pros, ripping apart small-to-moderate (10-12 feet) surf. Big Makaha was more of a legend than a reality to most contemporary surfers. The "point" Makaha wave is a huge aqua-blue wall that lines up and rifles a surfer for a ride of over a quarter of a mile. Few contemporary surfers have had the experience of riding the point.

February 17, early in the morning, Karl Heyer, a young surfer and canoe paddler from the Club, called to say Joe Teipel was reporting on the radio that the North Shore was being battered by "damaging" surf. North and west coast beaches were "closed" by the Civil Defense. Light, north-east trades were blowing. It didn't take longer than half a second for us to decide that Makaha was where it would be happening.

Karl is in an executive training position with a long-established and prominent Hawaiian company. Only in Hawaii can a 25-year-old go up to his boss and ask permission to go surfing because the waves were big. Karl's boss gave him the pass and we were off and running. It brought immediate flashbacks of similar journeys in the '60s . . . we were headed for huge Makaha.

The surf was thundering, a solid, glassy 15-20 feet. The beach had completely washed away, and the bath house was once again precariously balanced on its foundation. We were soon on the long paddle out the channel,

Nautical Night

Club sailors will gather for a Yachtsmen's Night dinner on Wednesday, May 25th followed by the presentation of awards to sailing class graduates and others.

A film of the 1982 Pan Am Clipper Cup race will round out the nautical evening, at which landlubbers are welcome, says Sailing Chairman Graydon Woolaway.

Dinner is priced at \$11.65 plus tax. Make reservations at the Front Desk by May 20th.



Fred Hemmings at Makaha.

where we stopped to take a few deep dives to acclimate our bodies and lungs, then over to the point.

Once on the point, it was my misfortune to rush into the first wave—a wave in the vicinity of 20 feet and lined up like the Great Wall of China. I made the classic mistake. Rather than angling down the wall right on the take-off, I dropped into a bottom turn. The extra split second would make it impossible to complete the wave and sure enough, about half way down the line the wave threatened to cave in on me. Angling for the top to get out, the lip grabbed the board and I was launched into the air. I came down in just the right position to be pulled over the falls upside down!

It was my first 20-foot-wave wipe-out in years. Both my contacts popped out, my sinuses were doused by what seemed the entire Pacific Ocean and once again I realized how vulnerable a surfer is in huge waves. It was a long swim in. Walking up the beach to retrieve my board, I was not too sure I wanted to go out again. It was the first round and I had already been floored.

Hesitantly paddling back out around the bowl, I looked up to see Karl stroking into a monster. He made the drop in and pulled himself up into a 20-foot barrel. It was a freight-train ride that he probably would remember the rest of his life. Alec Cooke came out on a North Shore stiletto gun. It was the kind

of day that you really "picked" your wave. After my initial wipe-out I had become gun shy. I guess when you get older other things become more important than stroking into a 20-foot wave. Cooke and Heyer were ripping. Ah . . . the reckless abandon of youth.

The waves were building, and looking toward Kaena Point, indicators signaled a set. As we scrambled for the horizon, the next wave loomed up and I spun to take off. It looked 60/40 against me. Years ago I probably would have been hyped enough to stroke into the maelstrom, but times have changed. I pulled back and caught an inside wave in. Yet, I still felt that I belonged. The rhythm of the ocean was still the same, feeling the line up, sensing the waves, time intervals, direction, position. The game was still the same.

On the way back into town that evening, I felt that an incredible amount of energy had been drained from me. I realized with a start that the days of my youth were over.

Editor's note: If you enjoyed the above article and have had some adventure you would like to share, we will appreciate your contributing a story and, if possible, photographs. The manuscript should be no longer than two typewritten pages, double spaced, or clearly handwritten. Leave it at the Front Desk addressed to Marty Buckley, Editor.