

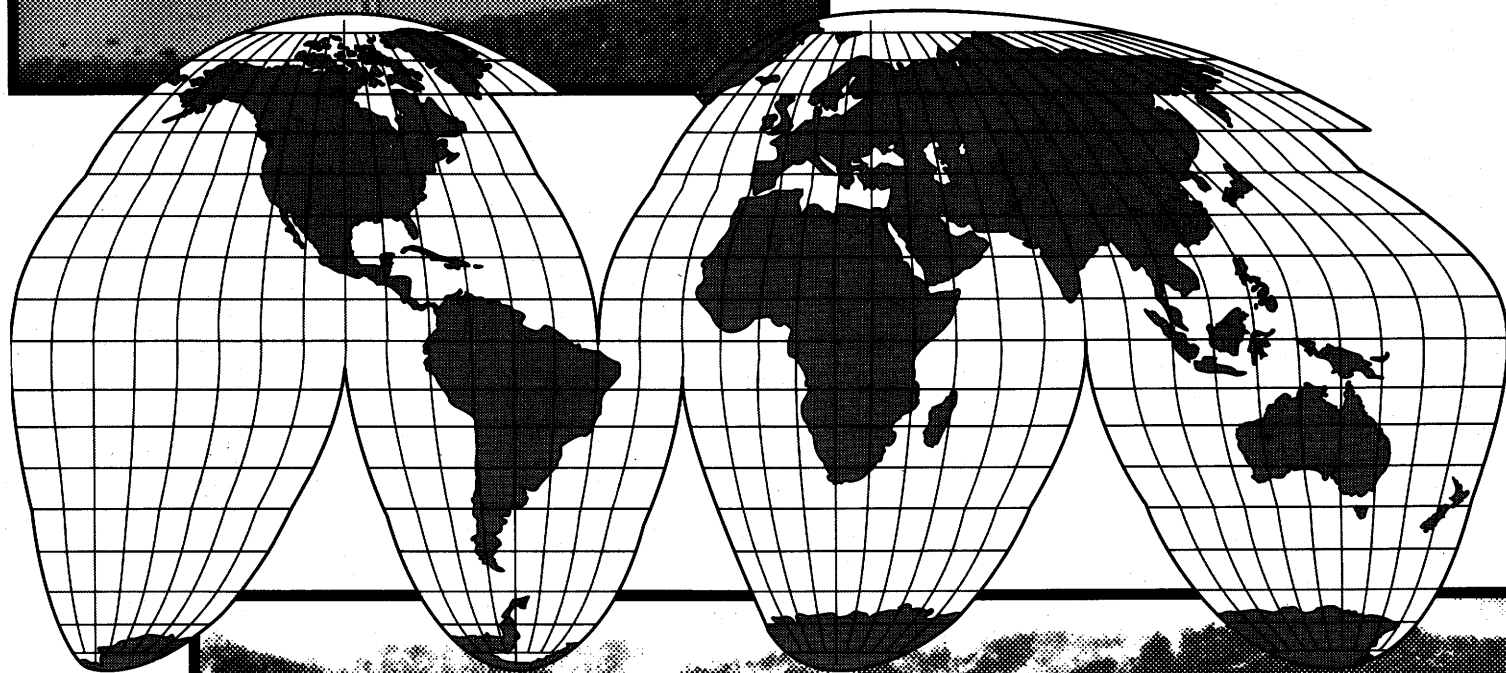
SURFING MEDICINE

THE JOURNAL OF THE SURFER'S MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

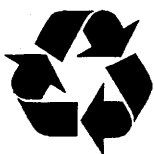
Issue #6, Fall, 1990

GLOBAL SURF MEDICINE

THE SMA IN
COSTA RICA



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THE SMA IN
WESTERN
AUSTRALIA

TABLE OF CONTENTS: ISSUE #6, FALL 1990

Ablaze with Stoke: The SMA Into Its Fourth Year	Mark Renneker	3
The SMA in Western Australia, The Bluff Conference	Geoff Booth	6
The SMA in Costa Rica		16
• Murder, He Wrote	Dennis Burke	
• Welcome Ceremony, or "How I Stopped Living and Became a Crazy Mixed-Up SMA Eco-Zombie"	Ron Bockhold	
• The Living Earth	Ron Bockhold (from <i>Gaia</i>)	
• Reflections on a Pavones Sunset	Ron Bockhold	
The Morris Saga: An Unhappy Sideshow to the Costa Rica Conference	Tony Peckham	28
The Taxman Cometh	Mark Renneker	29
Original Articles		34
• Skin Cancer, UV, and Ozone Depletion	Simon Leslie	
• Heading the New Wave	Jim Bradley	
Letters		37
• Amputated but Not Cut Off	John Przybyszewski	
• Ready to Surf	Geno Hopkins	
• Scottish Math Lesson #2	Andy Bennetts	
A Natural Experiment: the First Dear Surf Docs Columns	Mark Renneker	41
Anatomy of the Surf Docs	Mark Renneker	42
Upcoming Conferences		44
• Todos Santos, December 1990		
• Tavarua, March 1991		
• Grajagan, September 1991		
Updates		47

Cover Photos: Upper: Simone Gillett, early morning walk at Pavones, Costa Rica; no one out. Photo by Mark Renneker
Lower: Who in the SMA could it be? The Bluff, Western Australia. Photo by John Small

EDITOR'S NOTES

Over the past few months, there has been a distinct "greening of the SMA" - a process of ecological concerns moving to the forefront of our activities. It's a process that is in keeping with our Sixth Wave: "to protect and preserve the surfers' natural environment: the waves, the ocean, and our beaches."

Environmental and eco-medical issues were part of last year's annual SMA conference (the Bluff Conference, in Western Australia), came center stage in the SMA Costa Rica conference earlier this year, and are the focus of the upcoming SMA Tavarua conference. The arena of surf medicine has become global, and with strong SMA efforts in both America and Australia, we are bihemispheric.

The "all-photo" Fiji issue of the journal, garnered rave reviews and an avalanche of sign ups for the next Fiji trip. This issue will be the "less photos-more

filling" issue. Not that it doesn't have some great photos, it's just that a lot has transpired in the past few months that needs to be communicated to the membership.

The last journal came out almost ten months ago - which means we haven't made good on our plan of putting it out biannually (every six months). However, in the interim we put out a separate SMA membership directory - a journal-equivalent job - having realized that the SMA had doubled in size in the past year (from 250 members to over 500), and that the directory was too large to fit within an issue of the journal. It took some doing on Tony Peckham's part, but the membership data is now fully computerized; future directories will be easier to publish, and a membership dues reminder-system is in full operation.

The other delay was that this issue was supposed to be edited by members of the Australian SMA, and... Well, you know the joke about how many Austra-

lians it takes to screw in a light bulb. Four: one to go for the Fosters, one to screw in the bulb - and after he's finished breaking it, another to screw in a replacement bulb, and, finally, one to go look for the guy who went for the Fosters.

Editor: Mark Renneker
Managing Editor: Tony Peckham
Assistant Editor: Madame X
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ABLAZE WITH STOKE: THE SMA INTO ITS FOURTH YEAR

by Mark Renneker, M.D.

An in absentia address to the Fourth International Surfer's Medical Association conference, June 24 - July 8, 1989 [updated to July 1990], at the Bluff, Western Australia. Written by Mark Renneker, stuck in San Francisco with a crook back; delivered by Geoff Booth, attending the conference despite his crook knee (what a Man!).

"As a typical example of the hopelessly macho surfer mindset, and as a supreme example of why the SMA needs to exist, let me say at the outset that my injury is worse than any of your injuries. Go on, I challenge you. My bulging blob of herniated 4th-5th lumbar disk and the pain it causes when I bend forward or sideways and it crunches against various nerves and ligaments is certainly a match for what you might be suffering from. Geoff Booth's deranged knee - hah!, merely a malingerer; Brian Lowdon's little neck problems, supposedly attributable to over-zealous chiropractors ("aren't they all," Brian might say) - hardly worth mentioning; only, perhaps, could my problem be seen as rivaled by what is apparently some kind of mental illness - I'm referring, of course, to the sheer mania of that cockney-accented, Rad-hatted, Napoleon on-the-loose, Jim Bradley.

Coming on the heels of surfing my brains out in the best ever surf at Tavarua, at the March SMA conference, an inopportune sneeze on May 6th popped my disc out (a disc that, much as I hate to admit it, was first damaged while surfing in Portugal six years ago). Now, six weeks out, I'm heavily into a back rehabilitation exercise program, cranking out three hundred situps a day, etc., etc. Until this past week I couldn't sit in a chair for much longer than an hour, so it seemed an impossibility to spend 24 hours sitting in a plane to get to Western Australia, then an additional day sitting in a bouncing jeep heading up to the Bluff, and hope to do more than crawl into the bush and be put out of my misery by a tiger snake. Surfing

would have been out of the question - and, in fact, my back rehab plan calls for me to not try to standup surf until August.

[I did standup surf then, and managed a surfing trip to Northern Scotland the next month, but despite continued aggressive non-surgical back rehabilitation, I'm still plagued by daily episodes of back pain and discomfort over a year later. At some point, I'll make myself the subject of a Case Study for the Journal - stopping short of autopsy results, I hope.]

So, while I stay at home and heal, I want you to know that I'm truly unhappy to not be there with you. I realize the importance of this meeting, particularly in terms of it being the first SMA conference in Australia. It should be a landmark event, perhaps even on par with the first ever SMA conference at Tavarua, in September 1986. Certainly it is a portentous event, with tremendous potential for generating scads of SMA-related projects in Australia. How, then, can I be part of these meetings without actually being there? I can't share in the magic surf you



*Me and me' back, listing.
Photo by Jessica Dunne*

are getting (other than in my imagination), but I can lend some perspective to what you are trying to do there as far as the SMA goes.

Come September, the SMA will enter the fourth year of its existence. We all know what a meteoric growth the SMA has shown; it has been ablaze with stoke from the start. Rather than catalogue its many achievements, all of which are well-documented in our journal, I want to instead describe what I see happening - or not happening - now. I want to raise questions and express challenges, and give you something to chew on.

To begin with, and as an overview, let me say that I see the SMA as truly being an association, rather than an institution. There is no actual entity, only the interactions and communications (the "association") between a number of highly individualistic people who have in common an interest in surfing and health. There are practically no rules in the SMA, except: (1) the only excuse for not doing SMA work is if you went surfing, and, (2) any member can initiate an SMA project or act in the name of the SMA, and the more members they run their plan by, the better it will be. So far this has worked out quite well, with very few mistakes having been made or member's taking advantage of the privilege of having the implicit trust of all of the other members. In many cases, it has been a matter of doing what you might have otherwise done solely as an individual (e.g., writing an article for a surfing magazine on a health subject), but to instead do it in the name of the SMA - burying your ego slightly, doing it as the voice or intention of the SMA (perhaps donating any proceeds from the effort to the SMA, as well).

When the SMA was formed, six goals were articulated - and they have helped guide members' activities quite nicely. I want to work through each of these goals, or "waves," as we've called them, as a way of charting our present course.

The First Wave: The number one goal of the SMA is to educate surfers so they can spend minimal time hassling with doctors and maximum time surfing.

The major arena for educating surfers is through the surfing magazines. And in the name of the SMA, the greatest impact has undoubtedly been through the Dear Surf Docs column with *Surfer* magazine. Two years ago I set up an arrangement with *Surfer* magazine whereby the SMA would answer surfer's letters as a Dear Abby-like column, and that the payment for those columns would go directly to the SMA. With myself and Kevin Starr as the column's editors, the strength of the column lies in the body of SMA member consultants that help answer the letters. Kevin and I phone or send a copy of most every letter to one or more relevant SMA consultant members as a way of getting a range of ideas and information to present in the column. In effect, then, we act as a clearing-house on a given topic. Thus far, Kevin and I have found that we need to write all of the replies that we publish - not that other members writing efforts aren't good enough, but it's a way of maintaining a consistent style for the column. The column generates about \$250 to \$500 per month for the SMA. Also, in the name of the SMA, we frequently collaborate with *Surfer* magazine on health-related articles - writing *Surfer* Tips, etc. And, to their benefit and ours, they've grown accustomed to using our board of consultants as a way of fact-checking health information for their other articles.

Our work with *Surfer* magazine has given the SMA good visibility in the surfing world. We frequently get letters and phone calls because of it - leading to many new memberships. It eats up about two days per month for both Kevin and myself, and with Kevin starting internship we have told *Surfer* that the column will need to begin carrying the proviso that we can only answer those letters that are published. [This was done.] Up until now we have been answering all letters. The only way we could keep up that level of service would be to hire a part-time secretary, and we've asked *Surfer* to look for a sponsor to cover those costs - that they could be named at the top or bottom of the column as its sponsor (i.e., free advertising). I'm not optimistic that *Surfer* will come through, though - and, unless an SMA member takes responsibility for that task, it probably won't happen. [It didn't.]

The SMA Surf Docs column is 99% an SMA-USA effort. The lag-time and expense of using Australia members as consultants is unfortunately unwieldy. If you can think of a way around that problem, let's hear it. (FAX now available.)

Although Geoff Booth is a stalwart SMA member, his Dr. Geoff column for *Tracks* predates and is not (not yet, anyway) an SMA column. Geoff is the original and greatest surf doc writer of all of us, and we modeled the SMA *Surfer* column after his, but also structured it differently (as I've explained above, with it being interwoven with a large number of consultants and multiple opinions, and also that we early on set a more serious tone for it, avoiding the 'cocks and cunts'

letters Geoff receives). Geoff has said that "Dr. Geoff is dead," more in the vein that "Paul (of the Beatles) is dead" (and, of course, he never was), but one topic of discussion at your meetings might be how to begin shifting the *Tracks* column into more of an SMA-multimember input vehicle (if Geoff is willing to help it move in that direction, of course). In the way that the *Surfer* column has become the cornerpost of the SMA here in the USA, the same would likely be true for Australia. Jim Bradley, in the name of the SLSA, and Mark Gillett and Brian Lowdon, and others of you, have published health pieces in various Australian surfing magazines, but what I'm proposing is an all-out SMA assault. Be it with *Tracks* (and Rod Kirsup, A.K.A. "Dr. Bob"), or another periodical. Let it become your rallying point, your focus - a way to further draw together your association of Australian SMA members.

There have also been quite a number of articles written about surfing and health and the SMA that have appeared in various newspapers (mostly coastally-based) here in the USA (about 30 [40] such pieces, to date), but these have been low-impact in terms of reaching and educating surfers.

The largest and most lasting impact in terms of the number one goal of the SMA, that of educating surfers about how to better take care of themselves, will come from *The Handbook of Surf Medicine* - when it is published. It is important to realize, though, that strictly speaking the *Handbook* is not an SMA project. The book predates the SMA, and although a large number of individuals who eventually became SMA members contributed to it, the book will not be the voice of the SMA. A percentage of profits from it will be donated to the SMA, and it will be in the best interest of the SMA to endorse and promote the book, but it will not be the SMA's book. This became abundantly necessary over the past year as we have been working to help the SMA achieve tax-exempt status as a non-profit organization. [See article in this Journal, "The Taxman Cometh."]

Second Wave: To conduct and support research and educational activities on surfing and health.

Other than the implicit encouragement felt by all SMA members to get out and do 'something,' there isn't an identifi-



Locked in with the SMA. Photo by John Small