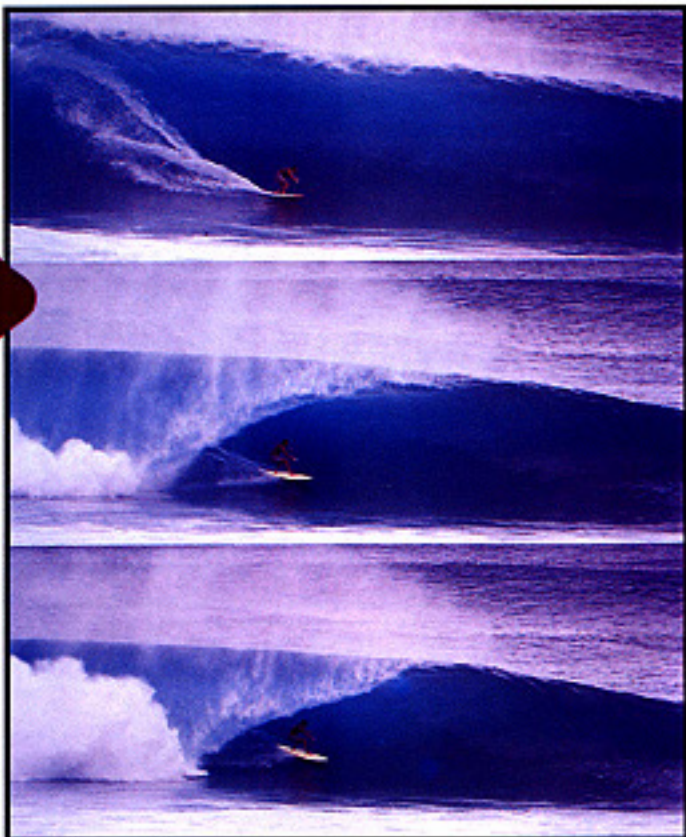


# the mighty swells

# of '74

By Monty Webber



can still see them now. The Hawaiians, Lopez, BK, Reno negotiating the fast-breaking walls of Winki. Nat Young's blasting in through the curtain of an eight-footer for an insane barrel. MP screeching down through the Bower. Huge rooster tails, no legrope. I was 13, it was 20 years ago. White-knuckled and drenched we three (John and Greg and I) screamed our way past the opening to Sydney Harbour. The enormous ferry heaved to and fro through the mighty swells of '74. The nervous, the frail and the elderly covered inside the safe and dry cabins. Fairy Bower headland was blanketed with thousands of blonde-haired brown-skinned surfers. They ohhhed and allllllhed en masse at every tube or hold down. The competition was in full swing, and the Aussies were pushing the Hawaiians deeper and deeper inside. The first Coke "Surfabout" was happening. John lost us quickly, so Greg and I found a ledge halfway down the cliff from which to shoot Super-8 footage. Greg started to "roll" as Dappa Oliver pulled into a shut-down pit

only to emerge from the white water still standing.

Jeff Hakman got a massive barrel all the way through as Bondi's Brad Mayes whacked it up square off the lip.

But it was all Peterson as far as we were concerned, so too it seemed to the judges.

Not only the fastest but the most dominating, just showing real disregard for the power of the waves as they hammered the reef at the base of the cliffs.

I was happy to read that the Hawaiians were really "put off" and intimidated by surfing at the base of those Manly cliffs.

It was the first time I'd ever been to the Bower and it was the first professional surfing contest I'd seen.

I could well sympathise with the surfers in the water, but was really stoked to see the Aussies sticking it to the Hawaiians in those conditions. Late in the afternoon a mass migration back to Manly Beach carried us off to the Manly Silver Screen for the premiere of the surfing film "Salt Water Wine".

Arriving early, Greg and I were confronted by an exhibition of the Hawaiians, surfboards in the foyer of

the cinema.

I was transfixed by the 8' Lopez Red Lightning Bolt, and sneaked a touch of its rail.

For a young goofy-footer in the early '70s there could be no more magical hero than Gerry Lopez.

He filled the screen, casually yawning his way through the gargantuan tubes of Banzai Pipeline.

I was tempted to peel off the cardboard name tag sticky-taped to the board but grew nervous. Greg had the movie camera out and was getting a few shots when Alan Rich, the guy who made the movie, came up and introduced himself. We talked for a while, and told him we were very keen

to make surfing films.

He asked us what kind of boards we rode and we told him we made our own. He was stoked, and saying he hoped we enjoyed the movie excused himself to the projectionist's room.

Once again Lopez was the star: 20 feet high and 60 feet across, surfing films in the olden days were no less than a mystical experience. It was a fantastic film and somehow fitting that we should - at the end of such a day's surfing - pay tribute to the beautiful power surfing of the Hawaiians on the North Shore of Oahu.

After the film was over and everyone had gone, Greg and I made our way

out through the foyer.

The boards were gone and the ground covered in rubbish, left by the capacity crowd after the opening.

I went to where the Lopez board had been, looking for what? I don't know.

But there on the ground was a white piece of cardboard. I picked it up and on the other side written in large black italics was "Gerry Lopez". I am not that much of a collector or keeper of things. But I took it home with me that night.

Sitting here now, with it in front of me, 20 years on, I can still feel the power and inspiration that I experienced that day. SURFING . . .