

# YOU AND YOUR SURFBOARD

by

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*With additional comment drawn by Maurice Bartlett*

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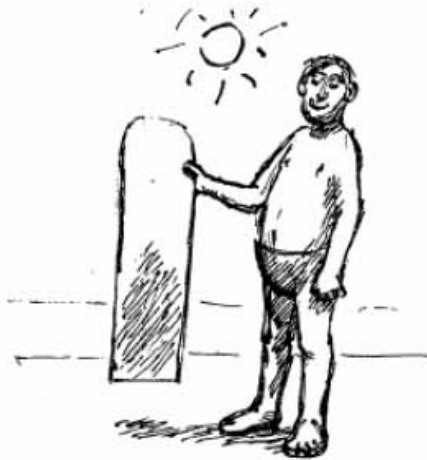
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## YOU AND YOUR SURFBOARD

**S**URF-RIDING is a sport and, like every other sport, its technique calls for study. Some people have a natural swing at golf, a natural backhand drive at tennis, but most of us need a little help and advice. It's always so much easier to see what the other fellow is doing wrong! And it is infuriating to sink to the bottom of the sea while others swish by you on their boards.

But surf-riding has certain advantages over most other sports. You need no expensive equipment. Any kind of board—your landlady's tea-tray, if you can find nothing better—and, presumably, some kind of bathing costume. There is, I suppose, no cheaper sport. And age makes no difference. It appeals to the youngest as well as the oldest member of the family. The older I grow, the more I enjoy it. And the youngsters are likely to be taking their waves



correctly and successfully while their parents are still at the flopping stage.

A word of warning. The first time you find yourself running back into the sea for the next wave, you will know that the fever has caught you. For the rest of your life, every other kind of bathing will seem a little tame. You will welcome gales that keep other people moping indoors.

You can best learn how to use your surf board by trying to surf-ride without it. Some of the best and boldest surfing I have ever seen was by men in Durban who either used no boards at all or had boards about half the size of yours.

After all, the main reason for a board is that most of us are more stream-lined with one than without one. There are no bumps, curves or protuberances underneath a board to slow it down. And if you practice without a board, you may learn at what fraction of a second you should join your wave to get the greatest push out of it. Yes, join your wave; the secret of surfing is the ability to think of yourself as part of the wave.

A man rows a boat towards the shore. He pulls at his oars and yet makes little progress. Then he gets at just the right spot on the crest of a wave, and glides in easily to the beach. A boat rides the waves better than you or I, but the problem of surfing is the same—to take the wave at the right moment.



*Surfing is a family sport*



**H**ERE, to begin with, are a few DON'TS.  
*Don't* fix the end of your board in the hinge of your body and your legs, and then crouch down with your back to the wave, hoping that when it comes it will obligingly flatten you out and carry you along. That position is neither useful nor graceful.  
*Don't* leap on your wave like a lion on its prey. If you do, you will go downwards, not forwards.  
*Don't* hold your board at arms' length and at right-angles to your body, as though you thoroughly disapproved of it. One sees scores of beginners with their boards flat on the water but with the

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upper part of their bodies sticking skywards as though they were the figure-heads of ships. You are supposed to be riding surf, not a horse.

*Don't* worry about big waves until you have learnt to take little ones.

*Don't* subside a couple of yards in front of the wave or a foot behind it. You want it to carry you, not to smother you or to leave you behind.

*Don't* leave all the work to the wave—push forward on your board; don't flop on it. There are limits to what a wave can do.



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*Don't hold your board at arm's length, as though you were a ship's figure-head*



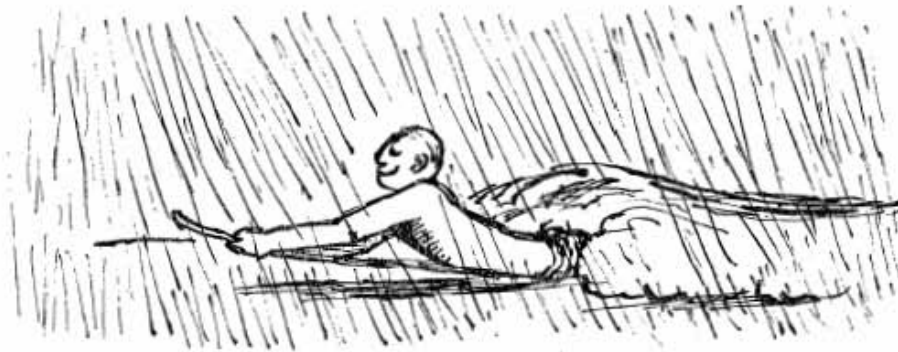
**A** few words about your board. I have already suggested that a tea-tray will do the job if you have nothing better, and get it out of the house unobserved. There is really no great advantage in having one that curves up gracefully at the end. Such a board is slightly less likely to turn downwards and to stick in the sand. But no board will do that if you first learn on small waves. When you are coming in on a big wave, the board shows no tendency to turn downwards unless you take it a fraction of a second too late; on the contrary, you find that you are pressing the front of it down.



There is no hard and fast rule about holding your board. Some hold it almost at the top. Most hold it about three-quarters of the way up. Hold it anywhere you like, as long as you can flatten yourself out on it with the least effort and the least delay. You must somehow learn, first, to look upon the board as part of yourself, and, second, to look on both of you as part of your wave.

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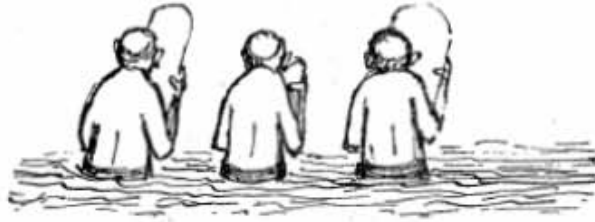
But there is a hard and fast rule about keeping your head down. Down almost on the board itself. The lower your head, the more you and the board form one straight line. And, incidentally, the greater your sense of speed that is one of the main attractions of surf-riding. A big wave may smother you, but you'll come to the surface in time to find that you are shooting towards the shore at an exhilarating speed. You may swallow quite a lot of water, but it won't do you as much harm as a lot of other stuff you send down your throat.



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Even greater than the difficulty of choosing the right wave is that of choosing the right moment to take it. For reasons that are explained in the next section, one part of the wave topples over and has behind it the weight of the rest of it. You have to get your surf board just where that weight is most making itself felt. If you go down too early, the wave merely froths over you. If you go down too late, there is no longer enough strength about it to carry you along. This, of course, is above all a matter of practice, but it becomes easier if you can picture yourself as the spearhead of the wave.

You will find that you need to go down almost in front of the wave if it is strong, and almost on top of it if it is weak. A strip of the wave, perhaps no more than a foot in width, contains its strength, and you have to discover by experience where that strip is most likely to be.

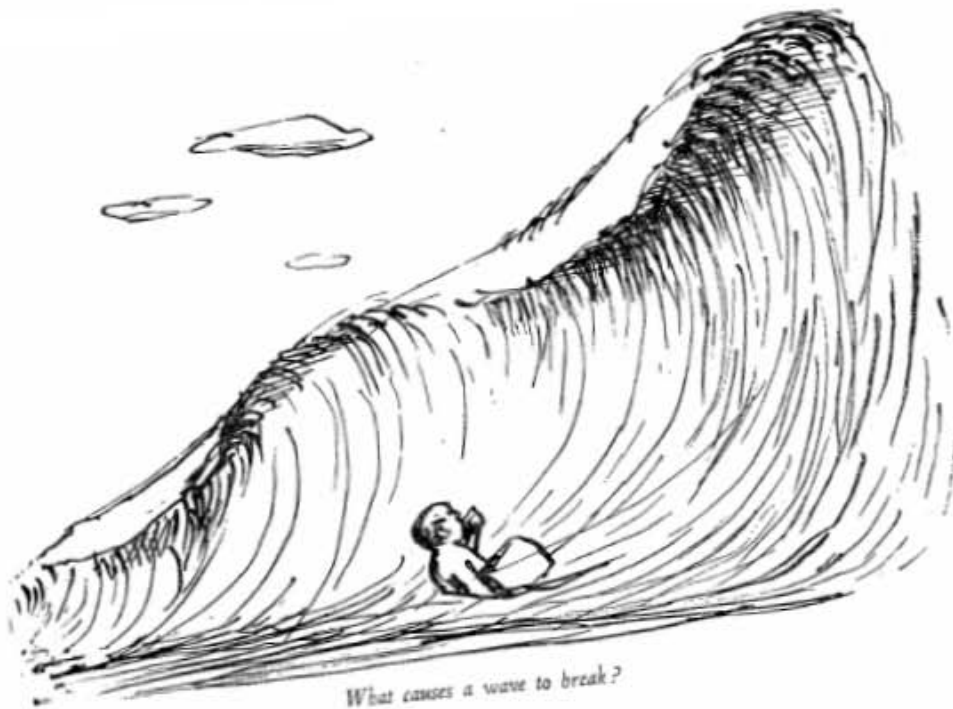


*Every bathe has its surprises*

**W**HAT causes a wave to break? The scientists who were studying the possibility of the Normandy landings found that the water beneath a wave is affected by it to a depth that is one-third of the distance between the crest of one wave and the crest of another. In other words, if there is a gap of thirty feet between the waves, each wave will be roughly ten feet in depth.

A wave is a wall of water advancing towards the shore. When it gets near the land, the lower part of it is held up by the sandy floor of the sea, but the top part still pushes ahead. The wave then ceases to be a wall leaning slightly backwards. It stumbles, as it were. The top part of it curls over and breaks. And each wave you can take when it is about to break is worth ten that have already broken.

This explains where the Germans went wrong about Normandy, and where you may go right in the selection of your waves. There are often rough seas along the Normandy beaches, but they are generally the result of local circumstances; the waves are close together and therefore have no depth. They were therefore much less of a danger to landing craft than the Germans had realised. In the same way, the best surfing is to be had on a day when the waves are far apart, for they have depth, and, therefore, strength.



*What causes a wave to break?*



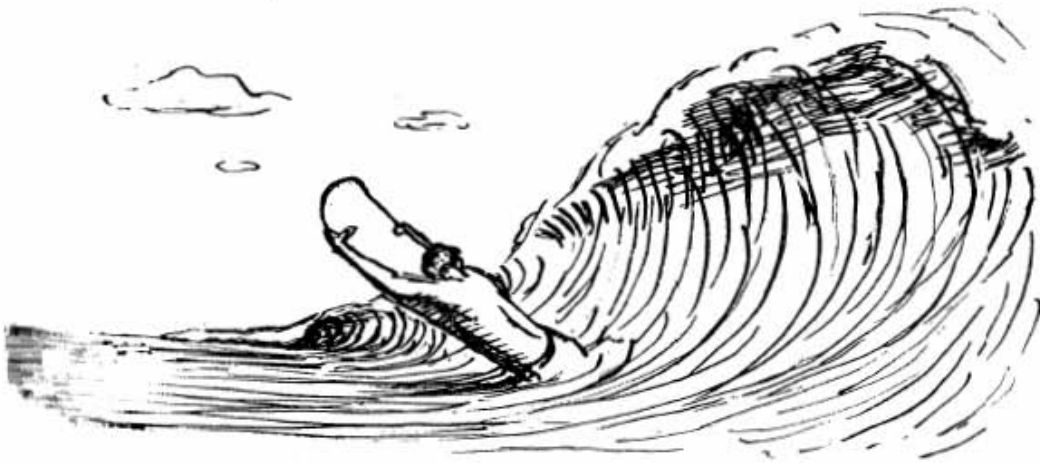
Very often, of course, you have both types of wave together—the long-distance, deep ones, and the local, shallow ones. Hence the tradition that every seventh wave is larger than the others—being farther apart than the local ones, the big, strong waves roll in much less frequently.

In such a sea, how are you to pick out the waves that can best carry your not inconsiderable burden? A wave that stretches right across the bay will be a good one.

If you are surfing in waves that have already broken, as you will be until you become an expert, you can sometimes see that the level of water behind an oncoming wave is considerably higher than the water in which you are awaiting it. Take that wave, for it has an immense weight of sea behind it.

Or you may feel the water dragging out towards an oncoming wave. Take that wave, for the under-tow is an indication of its strength. Or you may be lucky enough to get a double—one wave that obligingly catches up another wave just where you are standing. Then you can go shooting in with the strength of two waves to carry you.

On most beaches, the best time for surf is when the tide is about half-way in. When it gets high the beach is generally too steep and also, in a narrow bay, you get too many side waves reflected off the cliffs and breaking up the main waves.



*Take that wave*

The currents are generally strongest and most dangerous where there is a very wide beach. Don't bathe there on a rough day when the tide is running out.

I suggested earlier that a wave taken when it is about to break is worth much more than one that has already broken. But by the time you can verify that statement you will be approaching the expert level. Which is just as well, for this is really the only time when surfing might become dangerous.

It needs a considerable leap to get up to the top of the wave that is curling over, and if you are a fraction of a second too late in taking a really big wave—one that looks quite large from the shore and like the side of a house from where you are—you may shoot down to the bottom of the sea and break something. Your board or your ribs.

But by the time you reach that stage, you will have the benefit of your own experience; you will not need to blame this booklet.



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*Surf is warmer than still water*

**I**N the earlier pages of this booklet, I suggested a list of "don'ts". May I end by returning to that business of waste paper. The beaches that are best for surfing are also those wide, flat beaches that attract the largest number of visitors. The rubbish they leave behind them is a disgrace to Great Britain. The tide may wash it all away, but the next tide washes most of it back again, either in your own bay or in the next one. And it's no consolation to get rid of your own litter if you inherit somebody else's litter instead. The ice-cream cups and the paper bags may be a little more sodden, but they are none the less disagreeable. And who wants to undress on rocks that are scattered with egg-shell and orange-peel?

There is hardly a bay along the coast without some contraption in which you are expected to leave your rubbish. Do *you* always leave it there? Do you never thrust it down the nearest rabbit-hole and hope for the best? Or throw your empty bottles into the bushes in the belief they won't break? Some time ago I noticed a family about to leave on a cliff edge a vast quantity of picnic litter, and, with the rudeness which generally attacks me when my social senses are offended, I commented in a loud voice on this untidiness. The mother looked embarrassed, collected all the material—and pushed it all over the cliff on to the beach below! *You* wouldn't show so little imagination. *You* wouldn't show yourself so unworthy of the

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beautiful beaches on which you are privileged to spend your holidays. Or would you?...



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*Water like champagne.*

**W**ELL, that's all there is to it. We who present these pages to you represent two generations of surf-riders. We have been lucky enough to take out our surfboards in many parts of the world—in Natal, near Cape Town, in Ceylon, and in the great breakers of West Africa. By comparison, the surfing round the shores of Britain may seem insignificant. But I have yet to find anything so exhilarating as surfing on a sunny day somewhere along the Cornish or North Devon coast, with the sea clear and blue and purple. People pay a lot to drink champagne; they can bathe in it for nothing. So here's wishing you a good groundswell on a flat beach!

