

# Legends: Kalea Surfing

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Legends, verbal chants or melees preserved the customs and culture of the people who came to the Hawaiian islands from Polynesia. Verbal history came through the keepers of island heritage where the sport of surfing or wave sliding was more than just catching and riding a wave. This Royal sport was the center of social and ritual activity.

A proper ceremony would accompany the selection of a tree for the long or short boards. These would be shaped out of the heavy koa wood or the lighter wili-wili. Sacrifice of a red fish, Kuma, placed at the base of the tree, was preceded by prayers and offerings. The tree trunk would be readied for reduction to proper size and finished.

Chants recall contests held between surfers. Men and women of the Ali's, or chiefly class, would share surfing areas equally and frequently engage in contests. Kelea, the beautiful surf rider from Maui, was famed as a most graceful and daring surfer. A renowned surf on Oahu is named after another woman, Mamala. Near the entrance to the harbor of Honolulu is a body of water Ke-Kai-O-Mamala.

Pacific surfing was formally recorded by Captain James Cook on one of his visits to the islands. After Capt. Cook was killed his journals were continued by a Lt. King who wrote with understanding of the dynamics of surfing.

The arrival of missionaries and later on merchant ships in the 1800's created a vast change in the habits and lives of the native population. Surfing declined. No more gambling, sex or nude bodies. Innocence and joy were outlawed amidst much preaching of guilt and sin. Realities of plague, venereal disease and measles decimated much of the population.

Surfing almost disappeared until about 1874 when under the rule of King Kalakaua the royal sport was opened to the common man and woman. Happily surfers once again dotted the shores.

"Duke" Kahanomoku is credited with the renaissance of surfing. Improved commerce, economy and tourism revived the sport. "Duke" traveled world wide to demonstrate the techniques and pleasures of surfing.

Today surfing contests are held "anywhere the waves break." Competition can be described as functional or free style. Only one speed counts, "fast forward." There are at least 35 well known surfing sites around the world.

As in any sport a language develops that is representative in that particular environment. One now "shreds the waves," "Sand busting crushers" are most descriptive of a surfer losing a board and a wave. The ultimate crowd pleaser is a "round house or wrap-around," which is a 360° turn on the crest of a wave.

Clothing is specialized. As are surfboards. Custom designed boards are in demand. The material used now comes to the workshop as a “blank” and looks suspiciously like the Styrofoam used for disposable cups. No longer do manufacturers engage in prayerful rituals with the selection of proper trees. Orders are promptly filled to meet with local and worldwide demand.

Women have long enjoyed a strong membership in the Womens International Surfing Association. They are active in the sport world wide and have their own contests. Australia, Brazil, Japan, South Africa and the United States are only a few of the countries represented.

Faye Baird Fraser started surfing when she was a student at Point Loma High School in San Diego. That was in 1926. Connie Bechtal was on a board in 1915 on the waters of Glorietta Bay. Wendy Botha, from South Africa is the current world champion.

Writers have long been interested in the sea and surfing. Lord Byron, Mark Twain, Jack London, Eugene Burdick and surfer and scholar Kent Pearson to name a few.

Not surprisingly, surfers are concerned with their environment. Some have established foundations to battle for clean wraters and accessable beaches.

They also care for their fellow surfers. This past April, the Oceanside Longboard Surfing Club presented an Invitational meet to raise funds for a woman surfer who is battling cancer. There were prayers and song as in ancient times when this was a Royal sport.

*For Rell Sunn of Oahu*

Rise Great Waves from Kahiki  
Curl Above Us.  
Shred the Clouds with Your Crests  
Break Long and Smooth.  
(from Maui; the Demi-God.)