

Geoffrey Dutton, *Sun, Sea, Surf and Sand - The Myth of the Beach*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985. Illus., index. pp.160 \$40.

Australian sporting traditions derive from three main strands: imported English games, adapted to suit Australian conditions and society - the dominant strand; influences emanating more recently from the more pure capitalist American model; and finally the more indigenous sporting traditions. Surfing, and to a lesser extent

some aspects of swimming, are the best examples of traditions largely pioneered in this country.

Given the uniqueness of Australia's surfing tradition and the fact that, as Nat Young's film on the history of Australian surfing tells us, it is the one sport where Australia has dominated over the past two decades, it is surprising that so little research has been done on the subject. Fortunately some beginnings have been made with Edwin Jaggard's research and Mark Doepel's thesis on Manly Beach and Geoff Dowsley's research on swim coaching.

Drawing on art and literature Geoffrey Dutton has made a fine case for the significance of the beach in Australian history and a call for more serious treatment of this subject. For too long the beach has 'had a bad literary image' and few characters of fiction have got sand on their clothes or dipped their toes into the ocean. Writers it seems, and the same could be said of historians who have ventured into the area of cultural history, have preferred to focus on the bush and bushmen which is 'essentially a dry tradition, dusty with hardships and failure, populated by lean, sardonic men (and not many women), almost devoid of sexuality, the only pleasures being in riding horses, drinking and gambling.' They have ignored one of the more popular alternative traditions with its hedonism, 'democracy of the body', its urban setting, holiday atmosphere, celebration of life and association with leisure and sport - the beach is almost the antithesis of the outback legend.

Fortunately artists and photographers have had less of a bias against popular culture and have been less puritanical; they have had a long fascination with every facet of the beach environment and activities. This book contains a very fine collection of over a century of observation of the beach from S.T. Gill's painting of Manly Beach in 1856 and Henry Burn's painting of Brighton Beach in 1862 to the paintings of Charles Conder, Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts in the 1880s and 1890s to the outstanding photographs of Max Dupain and others and various paintings in the twentieth century. This collection will be very useful to explore attitudes to the beach and surfing, the beginning of the idea of surf swimming, and the context of surfing as a sport and as a leisure pursuit which, as Donald Horne put it, broke 'through the discipline of organised sport'. The illustrations also reflect many other

aspects of the history of the beach such as the clothing worn, attitudes to leisure and the role of beach paraphernalia, such as deckchairs. A painting by Ethel Carrick Fox of Manly Beach in 1913, for instance, suggests that while the surf boom was well underway (the beach was crowded and there were many people in the surf), some of the women on the beach were still dressed formally. They bore witness 'to the slowness of the hedonistic liberation of the body brought about by the beach and the sea' or the persistence of English attitudes to the surf and sun still. Max Dupain's fine photograph of Manly Beach in the early 1940s demonstrates the popularity of what Dutton calls 'rubber surf-boards' but what we used to call 'surfaplanes'.

Not all literary figures ignored the beach and Adam Lindsay Gordon published a poem, 'The Swimmer', in 1870 in which he seems to celebrate the idea of surfing long before the surfing craze began.

Sports historians in particular and cultural historians in general will profit considerably by closely studying this fine book which explores many aspects of the way in which sun, sea, surf and sand have combined to develop a very powerful indigenous myth. Dutton also demonstrates, perhaps more than any other book that I've read, that paintings, photographs and literature provide a very rich, and largely untapped, source for sports historians.

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