



## Sea Trials

There was a twenty knot southerly blowing. The run out tide on the Tweed bar was racing. The front wheel was tied down to stop it bouncing over the front and preventing me paddling. The spray deck was done up tight. My life jacket was on and there was a full water bottle under the straps on the front deck. Destination – Burleigh Heads, about 17km away.

I had launched in the lagoon behind Twin Towns and was nosing out into the main river. There were lots of eddies and from experience I knew that some of these could be nasty and try to suck you down. But, I felt comfortable and in control. That was until I looked out to sea. It was all white water. Bugger! That was when my feet started to shake. It could be adrenalin I thought but really I knew that wasn't true.

It took all of two seconds to hatch a plan: paddle like crazy for the breakwall on the south side, stay as close as possible without getting washed onto it, head straight out and try to get away to the south.. Plan hatched it was full speed ahead. Nothing like a bit of adrenalin to speed the implementation.

It was nasty near the front corner of the wall so I moved away a bit. Then I was out, waves breaking both left and right. Dirty water left and blue water right. The sand pumping jetty was now my landmark and I was paddling as fast as I could. My feet were doing a tap dance on the rudder pedals and my knees were tapping the sides. I steered a course through what I thought would be the breaking waves.

At about five hundred metres out, in nice blue water, except for the white bits, I decided that there was not much point paddling for New Zealand. It was time to turn left and head north through the dirty water racing out to sea. It was turbulent, it was rough, and I was pretty scared really. But I got through without incident and once more the sea was blue, but of course with white bits.

I think the leg tremours started to settle down at this stage and pretty soon I was in familiar territory. The board riders were bobbing up and down off the rocks at Snapper Rocks so I gave them a hundred metres or so and then gradually angled in towards Greenmount. Not all the way in mind you, I have seen rogue waves in there and I didn't fancy being up ended and having to call home for a lift. The seas were a lot smoother so I could allow myself a drink. Now I was comfortable.

Currumbin point was clearly visible with Burleigh headland a long way off and a bit indistinct due to the salt spray. Off across the bay I went. There was a fishing trawler punching its way down the coast so I gave him a wide birth. All the landmarks looked different being a couple of kilometers out to sea and I enjoyed the paddle. After about an hour I was passing the Currumbin surf club. It is a great spot to have breakfast but I wonder if they would be allowed build out on a rock like that these days.



The board riders on the point looked up when I went past but none waved. I couldn't wave anyway as I needed the paddle in the water to make sure the waves didn't tip me out. The life jacket was none too comfortable either, it has started to chafe under my right arm. In fact I was ready to finish. It must have been all the adrenalin earlier but I would have been well pleased if I was at Burleigh and could hop out. That wasn't the case though so it was off on a course for about two hundred metres off Burleigh Point.

It was only forty minutes and I was there. All of the coast has great memories but there are a couple of beauties at Burleigh so I reminisced. Last April we had a big surf. I may have seen bigger but I don't remember. This one was really big. I had a favourite spot to get in which involved standing in a bit of a gutter in the rocks, waiting for the moment and then jumping on the ski and paddling like blazes. Using this technique I could often be the only ski out there with the boardies. After an interminable time I saw the break, jumped on, crashing into rocks and paddling furiously. I got to within about 10m of the sand which was out past the rocks when in came the white water. Over I went. Up I got and then over I went on the next wave. This was repeated a few times until I decided I wasn't going to make it. There was a big sweep taking me northwards so I decided to hold the paddle, let the ski trail behind towards the rocks and just hold position until I got to the beach. This worked well with only the occasion bash on the bum from a rock.

Because of the big seas there was a small sand cliff on the beach. I allowed myself to be carried in, climbed the cliff and sat on the ski to think about the next move. An old bloke came over and asked me if I was OK. He said he ran the surf club and the helicopter that had been flying around was looking for the body of a surfer. I said I was fine but that I reckoned I could get out in the rip if I played my cards right. He must have thought I knew what I was doing so he left me alone.

After about ten minutes I reckoned there was a lull so I sprinted down and paddled like crazy straight out on the northern edge of the rocks. I was still going well and was about two hundred metres out when I looked left and saw the surf club boys in their boat. They were rowing like crazy, I was paddling furiously and at the same time congratulating myself at picking the same time as the locals to get out.

My way forward was still not too bad but there was something breaking to my left. Never mind I was happy to make it through. Looking left again there were bodies and oars everywhere and the white bottom of surf boat. Shame but never mind I was more than three hundred metres out and almost to safety.

Then this thing appeared. Three metres of white water. The bloody thing must have broken out near Lord Howe Island! What to do? What to do? Give up, turn around and ride it into the beach. Good plan. Half a second and it was implemented. Then this thing that felt like a runaway train hit me. Down I went. Up I went. Down I went, then up, then down, then up. Hold the paddle I thought, you can't let the ski go. Hope like crazy that the cord holds. Then it was time for a breath. Then the next wave hit. Then the up and down bit repeated.



By that time I was half a kilometer up the beach and feeling my age I can tell you. The next wave was smaller so I managed to get under control, hopped on and limped into the beach. I sat there for five minutes to catch my breath and then headed back to the car giving the bloke at the surf club a wide birth.

A man my age was better off watching the young guys carving the giant waves so that is what I did. After half an hour or so the club boat came back down the beach behind a tractor, so I wasn't the only failure for the day.

Anyway I digress. I won't tell you about the day that I caught a wave so big that I was so scared when I was in the tube that when I tried to scream with joy absolutely nothing came out. But that's another Burleigh Point story.

By the time I had replayed those stories I was ten minutes from home. I picked the breaks, paddled around the one I wanted to, into the gutter and aimed for the beach. Where did that come from? I didn't want a wave. Here I was though, being picked up by the shore dump. The end was less than impressive. An upending, a sideways role and then drag the full kayak up the beach away from the waves.

Out with the water. Turn it back over, wheels down and off for a beer. More training though. Dragging the kayak up the beach and the sand track is not easy. It took two rests before I made it to the top. Then I started to feel the chaffing under both arms. Sea training was obviously working well.