

## **Geraldton Board Rider Club History as told by Leon (Lurka) Norris**

The club was formed in 1976 and someone had the bright idea to call it Champion Bay Board Riders. Why? because Geraldton is located on Champion Bay. It took a couple of years to come to our senses and change the name to Geraldton Board Riders Club. With 120 members there was always plenty of outrageous fun – huge presentation nights with 400 attending, outdoor concerts with 3 bands playing to over 1000 party goers and many a keg after the local comps. Venues became hard to find though as we were progressively banned from one after the other.

In 1976 the first Sunny Comp was held. Backed by the Corner Surf Shop, Ripcurl, Quiksilver, Hot Buttered and many other surfing manufacturers, the contest was the first of its kind in WA. It was so successful that the event obtained a pro-am rating the following year and was the first pro-am event ever held in WA. Terry Fitzgerald from HB was a keen supporter of the event (and still is) and travelled to WA with top pro surfer Derek Hynd.

The Sunny Comp has continued every year, now into its 35th year with around \$12,000 in cash and prizes on offer and for the last 4 years has been webcast.. Plenty of surfing legends have graced the event, including Nicky Wood, Glen Kelly, Dougall Walker, Dave Macaulay, Mitch Thorson, Paul and Jake Patterson, Mike McAuliffe, Paul Patterson, John Mills, and Matt Branson.

GBR built a good rapport with many of the Perth clubs and would often host inter-club events with new clubs such as Dolphin Boardriders and Inland Boardriders (go the S-bend 'Wombat' sculling competition – how many middies can you down standing on your head!). The Easter Club Challenge was a regular event in Geraldton for many years.

The club had an early association with the WA Surf Riders Association and we saw many changes in structure and personnel occur. From the days of Jock Campbell, Bill Girdwood, Tom Blaxell, Toothy, Midnight, Tom Wilson, Peter Donkin, to the present day structure under the guidance of Mark Lane. GBR was never afraid to provide WASRA and SWA with plenty of 'constructive criticism' right from the early days and to their credit WASRA and SWA acknowledged the requests and put them into action wherever practical.

GBR always had plenty of surfers keen to contest the State Rounds especially Down South. A bus filled with 40 Gero surfers was always going to be fun with a weekend of surfing and partying on hand. The surfers always acquitted themselves well and began gaining respect as State team members on a regular basis.

The Corner Surf Shop began manufacturing surfboards in 1978 with our initial branding as 'Naturally Yours'. Shapers rolled through, with the first being Jim Carney from New Zealand. When Ken MacDonald from Newcastle was invited over, the branding changed to Ken's Southernman Surfboards. Other shapers such as Craig Bettanay, Col Ladhams, Greg Antcliffe, Len Dibben, Greg Laursen, Rod Hocker, Kym Thompson and Mick Button all lent their skills in the early days.

The Corner Surf Shop changed hands in 1984 and Ian 'Sam' Salmond bought the business and began a welcomed involvement in GBR. An accomplished surfer, Sam began competing in State rounds and also took an interest in judging. In 1985 he became the first Geraldton surfer (and maybe WA's) to be awarded the title of Australia's top judge. He backed up the accomplishment in 1996 by becoming Geraldton's first winner of an Australian surfing title taking off the over 40 division in his own back yard at Flat Rocks in Geraldton after obtaining a berth in the team as a reserve.

I approached SWA in 1995 and proposed that Geraldton host the 1996 Aussie Titles and provided them with a major sponsor – the Swan Brewery and Emu Bitter. The event was a success and I was proud to captain the WA team as we blew away the opposition from all States and took off the National Teams title. The national structure allowed the event to return to Geraldton again the next year with WA again taking the honours.

Driving to Flat Rocks for an early morning surf in 1997 I said to Sam "we need to look at developing our really young surfers – the ones that are just starting out but aren't ready to surf in GBR, something like a B division of the club ... bring them through when they are ready." Sam said, "like a Junior Development Club" ... I said, "yeah that's it and I know just the person to help out. Tom Attenborough has just started his surf coaching business ... he's got the talent and the personality."

GBR Junior Development Club was born and attracted a huge membership – some as young as 6 years of age - a 'huge' president in Terry Dhu and plenty of offers for sponsorship. The club was destined for success and the hardworking committee ensured that up and coming junior surfers were given every opportunity to develop their talents. As far as I am aware this was the first club of it's kind in Australia.

1999 had seen the start of GBR longboard club under the guidance of Bruce Montgomery and the establishment of the Geraldton Winter Classic at Coronation beach. The Junior Development Club had a strong committee with Terry Dhu, Andrea Rodd, Dave Williams and Kym Eastough all keen to see a top junior event established in the area. Steve Harrison from Slave Surf Shop came to the party and the Slave/SMP Junior challenge ran in January 2000 and became an instant success by giving junior surfers, from beginners to advanced, a platform to compete in a professional environment. Later on Dave Williams followed by Bob Fawcett took on the running of the Junior Development Club.

In 2000 Mark Lane presented Sam (club President Ian Salmond) and myself with an Australian Sports Medal each at the Aussie Titles held at Rottnest.

SWA manager Peter Donkin contacted me to say he wanted to nominate GBR as club of the year for the upcoming Surfing Australia Tracks Hall of Fame Awards. I put together a history of the club for the first time and was bloody proud of our achievements, especially for a regional club. A few months later I was travelling to a State Round at Yallingup when Peter called asking if Sam and I would be available to attend the awards in Newcastle to coincide with the Steel City Energy Pro. It didn't take much persuasion and with assistance from GBR and SWA, Sam and I attended the history making awards.

With 11 world champions attending, and Peter Townend flying in from California to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, the night was set to be a big one. After too many bottles of red wine and plenty of laughs, Sam and I headed to the stage to accept the Simon Anderson Award for Australia's number one club - the first time the award had ever gone to WA.

For his acceptance speech Sam produced the dunny role from inside his jacket and the crowd erupted as it unravelled onto the floor with his "travelled 40000 kilometres for this and we want to get our monies worth!" I followed and filled in with a brief history of GBR and how stoked we were to win the award for WA. Getting busted later trying to souvenir the Tracks wall hangings did not dampen our spirits one bit.

In 2000 I managed the State team contesting the Aussie Titles in Tasmania. It was pleasing to note that nearly half of the WA team was from Geraldton.

In 2008 I was nominated for the prestigious Duke Kahanamoku Award. This Award is presented to the person judged by Surfing Australia to have provided the most for the sport of surfing at local, State, National and International level. I accepted the Award at the Australian Surfing Hall of Fame Awards in Coolangatta Queensland and it's certainly been one of the highlights of my involvement in surfing. In 2009 the State followed suit with the Len Dibben Award for outstanding contribution to the sport of surfing.

The club continues to work strongly with local surfing development and the talent from our region just keeps coming. GBR is recognised as the top club in WA and our volunteer committee are a dedicated group who work hard to ensure the club continues to achieves its goals.... and we do have a lot of fun.

The club has 5 life members: Leon (Lurka) Norris, Ian (Sam) Salmond, Ross (Rossco) Middleton, Dave Williams and Kim (Wacka) Burton.