



To catch a wave!

Writer, Roger Pinckney, a Beaufort native, fell off his share of surfboards quite a few years ago. Reprinted with permission from *Sandlapper Magazine*.

They call this place The Washout, where the restless ocean gnaws away at the shoreline, attempting to make two Folly Islands where there is only one. There is something about the lay of the land here—or the lack of it, where the wind blows unimpeded across beach, dune and marsh and roils the water into what surfers generally acknowledge as the best waves on the South Carolina coast.

But not today. There is too much wind, too close to shore, creating what mariners call “a confused sea” and surfers call pure misery. Short waves, piled atop one another, angling in inconvenient directions, a great roar and jumble of green, white

and brown water. It’s Saturday, though, and the surfers are out in force anyway. Never mind the wind; never mind water temperature of a chilly 60 degrees. Clad in wetsuits, a dozen—maybe two—bob along outside the breakers, in the distance looking like a herd of displaced and dejected harbor seals.

Any of them will tell you they hope for hurricanes. Not a direct hit, but a good glancing blow that sends groundswells rising, breaking and thundering down upon Folly Beach. They hope for such tempests, sometimes pray for them, and when their petitions seem to bear windy fruit, they head for Folly from as far away as Greenville, while sensible locals buy plywood and screw guns and the sheriff tries to blockade incoming lanes.

That’s a good day, and this day is not so good. Astride their boards in the surging chop, surfers struggle to keep from being

blown ashore while craning necks seaward, hoping for the one wave in an hour that’s really fit to ride. A half dozen see a likely candidate coming, and paddle like mad to get up to wave speed. Two or three make it, accelerating, sliding down, down, moving laterally along a wall of deep green water rapidly collapsing into churning froth. One falls sideways with a great splash; another pitches headlong overboard; the third hangs on for another instant, then disappears into a swirl of turgid foam. Elapsed time: about 22 seconds.

All this for a 22-second ride? Why do they do it? Evan Russel says it’s because as a very young child, he sat on the beach in Hawaii and ate sand. Besides a severe case of diaper rash, he figures he was infected with the love of big waves.

Russel and his girlfriend Jessica Boozer hang out at Folly every chance they get,



braving hypothermia, wind, sun, jellyfish (rub briskly with meat tenderizer and sand)—as appropriate to the season. Though neither has seen any sharks, not long ago one of their buddies bumped into something very big and alive, prompting a spring up onto his board with bruises and a good story. But then there are the sea kayakers and boogie boarders, competitors for the perfect wave. A kayak has a nasty way of turning sideways in the breakers, in the path of rapidly approaching boards. Meanwhile, the short foam boogie boards, if paddled by helpless neophytes, are sometimes underfoot and always below contempt to surfers.

Real surfers, male and female, take their boards three ways: short, long and frequent. A short board is about as long as the operator, the other a yard or so more. Each has its advantages. Long boards are fast and powerful; short ones are capable of some spectacular aerial displays. Serious surfers, it seems, come in only one size: medium, wiry and tough, the girls lithe and fit and the boys with physiques like rodeo bull riders (minus the bowlegs).

All this—water and sky and sea, sun block and wetsuits, the lingo, the time, the expense, the risks—all in pursuit of the perfect 22 seconds where adrenaline takes over and you find the limits of language.

Folly Beach has had a heady relationship with the sport since transplanted Californians introduced it in the mid-1960s. Inevitably, there were whiffs of a well-known vegetative substance upon the wind, and rumors of occasional public lewdness. The Folly Town Council, not overly impressed, sought to ban surfing outright. There was considerable civil disobedience, accompanied by arrests.

End of story? Not quite. Rather than being banned, surfers were banished to a particularly undesirable stretch of sand. Overcrowding led to bashed heads and broken ribs as surfers piled upon each other in the backwash.

Common sense eventually prevailed, and now the surf culture is something of an institution on Folly Beach. Yes, cops regularly cruise the road beside The Washout, weather eyes open for disorderly persons, underage drinking and funny cigarettes. No one is allowed to tempt God and Fate by “shooting” the Folly Fishing Pier. To eliminate pilotless, rampaging boards, there is a \$200 fine for not having yours securely tethered to your person. Remaining community skepticism is tempered by the crowds at numerous weekend competitions who spend money at cafes and bistros and at Folly’s half dozen surf shops, which offer everything from rental boards to something called Sex Wax, a concoction to keep flesh goosed to fiberglass.

Keith Bolus, attorney at law, was there to see this colorful evolution. The second half of Bolus and Bolus, he has an office on Folly’s Center Street, below the plastic head of a great white shark, jaws toothy and wide agape. Keith credits the first half of the firm—his older brother Tommy—as being a local first-generation surfing pioneer. Keith came along a bit later and pegs himself a member of “Generation One-Point-Five.”

He is a man of considerable passion, whether arguing criminal, civil and family legal matters or talking about a lifelong love of green, breaking water. Just above the gigantic plastic shark, his upstairs law office is decorated with a vintage longboard on one wall, a fine print of the surf breaking around the Morris Island lighthouse on the other, and a real neat shortboard on the carpet in the next room.

Lean and fit like most of his breed, Bolus scarcely can stay seated when moved by stories of the old days in the Folly surf and of trips he's made lately in search of good waves, to Florida, Puerto Rico and Costa Rica. Intense and animated, he wrestles with the sorry trade of money for time. "The more I can afford to go," he says mournfully, "the less time I have." But ask him about the power of a good board on a good wave, and he just grins and looks off into middle distance—a speechless attorney, the rarest of breeds.

Back at The Washout, Farrah Dawson and her buddy Ryan Balderson, buffeted



by wind and wave, struggle ashore for a little break. Farrah is 20-something, recently retired from a career as a professional water-skier in Florida. Ryan has a day job at a Summerville boatyard and is spending weekends teaching Farrah to love surfing. The couple sit in their car, drying out, making plans for a great adventure. A travel agent is offering a round-the-world surfing excursion, package airfare to eight beaches of your choice. Ryan has a few in mind: California, Hawaii, then Fiji. After that, who knows? Australia? The Cape of Good Hope? Farrah tousles sunbleached hair with a towel and nods, blue eyes dancing with anticipation. Maybe next summer.

Out in The Washout, a good wave gathers strength, rumbles ashore, a half dozen wetsuited figures precariously poised on its curl. The sea wind whines in the wires, sending a patch of blown sand whispering along the beach, hissing secrets only those who love this place can hear. In the distance, the sea wrinkles, crawls. Surfers bob like seals, and another wave comes thundering in.

