

24 September 2011

## SURF RATS, GROMMETS, NUGGETS AND WAXHEADS: SYDNEY'S SALT-STAINED SURF STORY REVEALED IN NEW EXHIBITION

Long before Bondi was world famous and Sydney's beaches were synonymous with boardies, barrels and breaks, surf bathing, beach inspectors and timber paddleboards ruled the surf and sand.

*Surf City* a new exhibition at the Museum of Sydney from 24 September, traces the rise of Sydney's surf scene from its maverick early days that pushed the boundaries of the Australian way of life, to a national obsession that redefined the sport world-wide, cultivating international legends and a multi-billion dollar industry.

Today over two million Australians and one and a half million tourists hit the waves every year, but 60 years ago sun bronzed lifesavers ruled the beaches with hollow 'toothpick' boards and surfboard riding was an underground sport.

Surf mania struck Sydney in 1956 when the visiting Californian lifeguard team hit Sydney's shores with a new breed of balsa surfboards — finned, fibreglass 'Malibus' that captivated beachgoers across the city.

Local boardmakers were bombarded with orders and suddenly surfing with its laid-back Californian 'tude took over the beaches, clashing with the rigid rules of lifesaving clubs and cementing Sydney as Australia's surf city.

A chance gift of an early Australian surfing movie inspired veteran weekend waxhead and curator Gary Crockett to celebrate Sydney's rich and colourful surfing story.

"A couple of years ago a friend gave me a copy of a 70s cult-classic surfing movie and it reminded me how important the movie was at the time and how much enjoyment surfing has given to Sydneysiders in general.

"Surprisingly boardriding really only took off in Australia about 60 years ago, yet Sydney's 50km or so of coastline has produced more world champions and stand out surfers than any other city worldwide.

"Sourcing objects, stories and photographs has been the most interesting and challenging aspect of developing the exhibition and has allowed me to coax treasures from some of the smaller enthusiasts and surf culture hoarders.

"One of my favourite items in the exhibition is Snowy McAlister's green canvas sneakers from the mid 60s. Snowy pioneered boardriding on the Northern Beaches and was the first Australian to be inducted into the surfing Hall of Fame, he also bridged the great divide between the lifesaving scene and surfers.

Over 160 surfing treasures from private collections and institutions across the country will be on display including a rare 1957 plywood 'hollow mal' surfboard, a poster for the 1972 premiere screening of *Morning of the Earth* at Manly, vintage surf clothing, bikinis and boardies and a selection of early surfing magazines, books and records.

A 20 minute documentary tells the stories of the pioneers of the Australian surfing industry, with interviews from surfing legends such as Midget Farrelly and Brian 'Jacko' Jackson and also features rare archival footage of the Californian surfing demos at Bondi Beach in 1956.

*Surf City: Getting Radical in the 50s, 60s & 70s* open 24 September 2011 – 18 March 2012  
at Museum of Sydney, corner Bridge & Phillip Streets Sydney, daily 9.30am – 5pm, T 02 9251 5988, [hht.net.au](http://hht.net.au),  
general \$10, concession \$5, family \$20.

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