

Steve Downy

After a few days of watching and waiting for swell size to increase, the southerly finally worked it's magic and the Island began to pump once again.

Unfortunately the Island rarely gives up its perfect cylinders, doing so only for short periods of time around mid-tide, swell and wind permitting. Westerly winds produce the best conditions coupled with a southerly or southeasterly swell. Only when all these conditions are present does the Island pump out its most treasured possession — TUBES.

On a low tide the Island becomes extremely dangerous to ride as the shallow reef is only just submerged below the critical take-off area. Injuries of one kind or another are common and if my memory serves me correctly one surfer has died riding the treacherous reef. Local surfers who

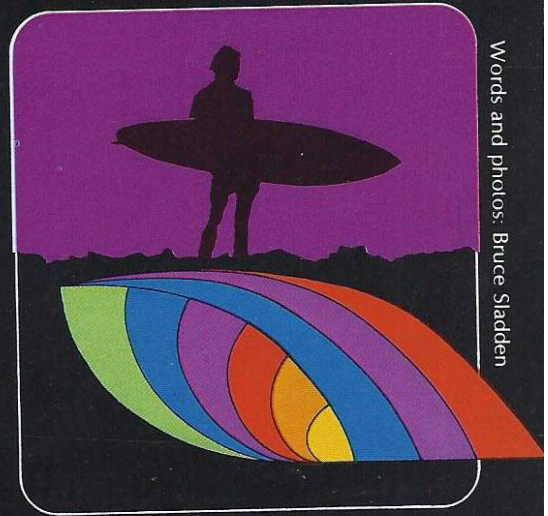
find the relatively uncrowded conditions worth the uncertainty are rewarded more than not with some unbelievably hollow waves. The large majority of surfers, however, prefer to ride the nearby and more predictable point surf which produces some nice tubes, on the first reef, under similar conditions.

On the first day, with a six to eight foot groundswell pushing through and a WSW wind blowing at 10 knots the Island began to churn. Local surfers, Steve Robertson and that intrepid mat rider, Steve Downy and friends made the most of it before a change in wind direction caused conditions to deteriorate. The following day proved more consistent with a 15-knot westerly meeting a slightly larger swell. Early morning high tide saw the Island breaking a eight foot with most waves revolving magically

around any surfer who cared to place himself in that position. Nearly every wave had two hollow sections. The first formed at the take-off point and ran for 40 feet while the second started churning on another shallow reef just prior to the end of the wave. On many waves Steve Downy took off inside the other riders, freefell to the bottom and turned, gathered speed from somewhere to rise slowly up the face, was enveloped for seconds by the revolving lip only to reappear through white foam and spray with enough speed to make the next fast-forming section. His ability to move in and around the lip of those hollow waves had made him well known in the area.

As more of the reef was exposed with the approach of low tide the riders began to paddle in one by one, leaving only wave and reef to play out the final scene.

shark island



Words and photos: Bruce Sladden

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