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Surf nation

August 17, 2008

Surfers were born free, but are everywhere obsessed. Is this freedom?

What a summer it's been. The weather may have been lousy but there's been a wave - and often a good one, too - just about every day. I've surfed for two-to-three hours minimum, six days a week, for the past couple of months - not the norm for July and August.



But regular exposure to waves has a serious side effect. You just want more waves. You dream about waves you've surfed, you fantasise about waves you might surf, you plot trips to destinations where waves reel from points with the perfection of the right-handers found at Cape St Francis way back in Bruce Brown's all-time classic, The Endless Summer.

In short, the more you surf, the more you want to surf.

Lately, I haven't been able to sleep at night for thinking about surfing. Surfing lurks at every corner. It animates everything I do, whether overtly or subtly. I plan each day according to the tides and prevailing conditions on the



north Cornwall coast or here on the south coast at my fickle local break. I read weather charts, check surf sites and structure my work around going for a surf. I turn up to interview people still wet from surfing and with sand in my hair, and explain that I'm sorry, I had to take my sons surfing, I hope you don't mind (down here, they never do). Most nights, I watch surf movies with Harry, the elder of my sons who, as regular readers and those who surf at Sennen Cove will know, is himself totally obsessed. We've been going through the likes of Free Ride, Morning of the Earth and Five Summer Stories lately, and loving every minute.

Immersed in surfing as I am, I try to work out why. Sure, only a surfer knows the feeling, but will this do as an explanation for why I try to evade any work trips to London (or any trips anywhere, really) because I hate the thought that if I'm not here, I might miss some swell?

And I recall that so often, in the course of interviews either for surfing magazines or for Surf Nation, surfers would tell me that, for them, surfing was freedom. This was the reason they surfed - to be free. Many would also talk about being close to nature, about surfing with dolphins, about stress relief when work or family issues are causing grief, but by far the most common rationale for surfing was that it represented freedom.



But are we free, if all we do is surf, think about surfing, plot our next surf and then go to bed dreaming about surfing?

Or are we addicts, hooked on an exquisite natural high but still, when all is said and done, hooked?

In short, is to surf really to be free?

Meanwhile, for some pure stoke, check out The Original Surfboard Company. Set up by Sally Parkin, the company makes hand-crafted wooden bellyboards in classic style. They're designed in Cornwall and made in Devon. The images here are by Joe Cornish, one of the UK's leading landscape photographers. My only fear is that he, and Sally, and all those who ride waves on these boards, might be just as free as the rest of us.

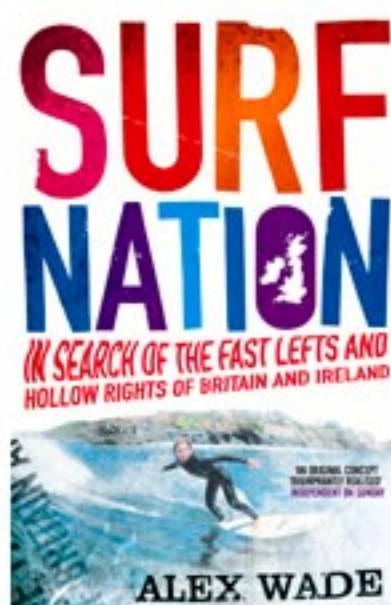
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ALEX WADE



Alex Wade is a freelance writer who lives and surfs in the far west of Cornwall. Alex's blog will bring you up-to-date news of our surf scene, what's on and where to surf, as well as the best of contemporary surfing writing from around Britain. The aim is to get you stoked and into the water as often as possible, because, as the old saying goes: "Surfing is life. The rest is details."

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