

From the North Shore of Oahu

By Patrick Kelly

We've been having a busy winter over here on the North Shore of Oahu. We guard 5 beaches: Sunset Beach, The Pipeline, RockPiles, Waimea Bay, and Haleiwa. Plus we have a mobile patrol - lifeguard tower on wheels- at the Chuns Reef/Laniakea area, Mobile jet ski patrol, and 2 Lieutenants. with trucks, who take up the slack from Kaena Point to Kualoa Regional Park; and back up the operation along with the North Shore Captain.



One of the North Shore's PWC guards sits ready at Waimea Bay

The winter started off kind of normal with a few swells in the 10 ft category. One particular Saturday in October with extreme low tides made the Pipeline extra dangerous. Two pro surfers sustained broken legs and another fellow busted his face up pretty bad. That was just the start. The jet stream took a dip bringing the storms that produce waves close to the islands, a typical "El Nino" pattern. This caused back-to-back 20 ft plus swells at the rate of about 2 per week, almost 3 times the usual intensity level. The result was radical beach erosion exposing sandstone and boulders where there is usually beach. It hasn't been this bad since the early 80's. Giant gnarly surf and the killer shore break with strong river- like currents that goes along with it have become the norm. Needless to say, we've been earning our keep making sure everyone stays safe.

The outer reefs have been going off much to the delight of tow-in surfers. Our ski operators have had their hands full patching up all the crash and burn casualties. We've had more tow-in related first aids in the last 3 months than all that happened since the sport started about 10 yrs. ago. Within two weeks in January guards responded to and successfully treated 3 near fatal surf related disasters. The first was at Sunset Beach where a guy got caught inside and pushed over the super shallow bone-yard area where he got pummeled to the bottom, breaking 9 out of 12 ribs on one side and punctured his lung. If that wasn't enough, his leash got caught on the reef and wouldn't let him go. He managed to free himself and didn't realize the extent of his injuries until he started coughing up blood while riding the tail of his broken board back to the beach. Lifeguards from Pipeline and Sunset responded on the ATV. They treated him for his injuries and shock until the ambulance arrived.



Mobile Patrol with Ski

*Waimea Bay with new tower and
“Voice of God” PA system*



Next it was a body boarder at Off the Walls who experienced a heart attack in the water. His son, who was also out, supported him and fellow surfers alerted the lifeguard at Rock Piles, who assisted him to the beach and started CPR. The AED was applied and shock was advised. He made it and will live to ride again.

Shortly after, disaster struck again this time at the Pipeline. A surf photographer trying to get a tight action shot got himself a little too close for comfort with the notorious shallow Pipeline reef. He was knocked out on impact, a close encounter of the worst kind. Luckily a fellow photographer was right there and held on to him as they got pushed to the inside where lifeguards got him up the beach and applied two breaths with the ambu-bag which was enough to get him breathing on his own. After a few weeks in the hospital to recover from broken shoulder, ribs, and a bruised brain not to mention pneumonia brought on by secondary drowning, another guy will be out there again thanks to the well trained guards at Ehukai Beach Park who knew what to do. (Ed. Note; See details in this issue from the survivor, **Ray Hollowell**.)

Thanks to the Triple Crown of surfing, we are sporting a new state of the art PA system at our new tower at Waimea Bay. Three huge speakers and a powerful amplifier help create the “voice of god” that helps us to keep people out of danger and talk a potential rescue customers back to the beach. I just read the surf report from Pat Caldwell and it looks like we are in for plenty of more big swells in the coming weeks.

One good thing about the North Shore is, we work real hard for 7 months and enjoy good training conditions for about 5 months when the surf is down. The other sides of the island have been plenty busy too, but that's another story.

Next up, The North Shore Lifeguard Assoc. has a super fun bodysurf event in March at the Pipeline. Meanwhile see you at the USLA Board of Directors Meeting in May.

Aloha, Pat Kelly



Use Caution!