

All girls road trip

HELLS HAREM

08

The Stoke of Learning

The stoke is obvious on the face of both Dave and Rachel



Day two: back to basics



Tania



collecting mussels for dinner



“WHAT AN AWESOME WEEK. EVERYONE WAS VERY SUPPORTIVE AS WE ALL WORKED TOWARDS A COMMON GOAL. KANE AND DAVE WERE GREAT TEACHERS, ALWAYS WITH A ENCOURAGING SMILE WHEN YOU WIPED OUT AND MAKING SURE WE ALL HAD FUN. IF YOU WANT TO GIVE SURFING A TRY OR IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS, I THOROUGHLY RECOMMEND THIS WEEK AWAY AT GORGEOUS NINETY MILE BEACH.” RACHEL

SOME THINGS WE LEARNED ON OUR SURF ADVENTURE...

→WHEN popping up on your board, keep your hands further back on the board, This helps you get your feet in the right position and give you way more power to push up.

→DO not hold onto your rails when popping up; this is a common mistake and it's so much easier with your hands on top of your board.

→SOMETIMES it's not always good to take the first wave of the set because if you don't make the drop you'll cop the rest on the head.

→DON'T drink too much on your first night or stay up reading gossip magazines – (although reading CURL's OK). Your body will appreciate a good nights sleep.

→DON'T let your mind get the better of your body before you even hit the water. Think positive and you'll have way more success.

→PADDLE, paddle, paddle and paddle and when you've done that, paddle some more.

→SPENDING a few minutes stretching before and after may save you some tired and sore muscles.

→WHEN on a surf trip, don't be afraid to ask if you don't know. Your coaches have a wealth of information and can really help you improve.

The Hells Angels motorcycle gang have shrouded themselves in a cloud of mystery and controversy, thanks to a strict code of secrecy between its members. They don't use last names, even with each other and often adopt a nickname of sorts. Coupled with their colourful history, drunken antics and undeniable links to crime they have become notorious. However, there is another side to the Angels, a free spirited group brought together by a common goal possessing a loyalty and brotherhood unseen in many other groups or gangs.

The Hells Harem had some similarities to its brother group. We were a gang of sorts, brought together by a common goal and we called each other only by our first names (mainly because having only just met no one knew each others last names). We were bound by our own code of secrecy, "what goes on tour stays on tour" (however having a couple of journalists onboard definitely put a bit of a damper on that one!)

and for the week at least, we were definitely free spirited. Yet it was there that our similarities ended. This group of marauding females replaced choppers with boards, gang patches with wetsuits and knife fights with afternoon surf session.

We were quite an eclectic group who had all left behind our everyday lives (husbands, boyfriends, jobs, kids etc) to join NZ Surf 'n' Snow Tours in the winterless north of Ahipara.

DAY ONE

The group left Auckland around 10am and arrived in Ahipara five hours later. Due to a lack of swell they spent the afternoon exploring the bay, gathering pipis and tuatuas and sand boarding on the local mountainous sand dunes. Emma and I had arranged to drive up later that day as we both had to work on Monday morning so didn't leave Auckland until 3pm. It had been a hectic day and we arrived in

Kaitaia around 7pm starving and tired. Knowing we were late we decided to stop in Kaitaia for dinner and found an excellent bar and restaurant and had a much needed beer and something to eat while contemplating what the hell people did for kicks in Kaitaia. It had the feeling of being in the middle of nowhere. Refuelled and recharged we drove the final 15 minutes to Ahipara to meet the rest of the team. Unbeknown to us the message of our late arrival had not reached our guides, Dave and Kane and they had been patiently waiting for us to arrive before having dinner. By now it was past 8pm, everyone else was hungry and we had to explain we had already eaten, not a great first impression! The rest of the evening was spent talking over a beer or two, playing pool and getting to know everyone.

The first thing that struck me about this group was that they defied what was "normal" female behaviour. Most girls cannot even go unassisted to the toilet

without taking a friend to hold their hand yet here were ten girls that until this trip most had never met. The second thing was the varying ages and backgrounds of the group. Jo, [30] was a lawyer from Wellington, Michelle [36] a marketing manager from Germany, Ali [19] a gap student from Norfolk, Suzie [22] an army chef from Auckland, Aude [31] a child psychologist and massage therapist from France, Naomi [31] was inbetween jobs, Tania [32] worked for the ANZ, Rachel [34] was a merchandiser manager and Emma [24] and I [42] were both from CURL. Joining our eclectic group were our two instructors/guides/chefs/entertainers Dave and Kane.

Our accommodation in Ahipara at Ahipara Surf Lodge was right on the beach with a good consistent learning wave right in

front of the house. Complete with dorm like accommodation and twin rooms the veranda spread out onto a lawn that overlooked the beach breaks. To top that off it had a table tennis table that converted into a pool table in the evenings. Perfect!

DAY TWO

Lesson number one, do not challenge your surf coaches to a game of pool and beat them on the first day. It was with smiles and a smirk of satisfaction that the boys roused us from our beds just before 6am. The forecast for the day was for increasing winds so the aim was to get out in the water as early as possible. We ate breakfast and headed up Ninety Mile Beach. If you have not driven on the beach before it is a bit of an art. Where the sand is softer you seem to lose all control of the car and the tires just seem



Day two: Suzie, Emma and Aude



Tania

to follow the ruts already made by previous drivers. Emma did an amazing job of driving us back and only admitted to being slightly terrified when we were safely back on the tar seal.

We followed the NZ Surf Tour truck half an hour north where the waves were breaking out the back around 2-3 ft and reforming again into perfect learner waves. The lesson began with taking us all back to the basics. I didn't think I'd find myself doing pop ups on the sand again, however, there is always something you can learn. Dave gave me a great tip on hand placement and it made it so much easier to get to my feet in one fluid movement. Once the basic sand lesson was over we hit the waves. Due to the reform we were all able to surf in the same area regardless of the differing levels of ability. Some spent the morning practising getting to their feet and riding the waves in the reform. For the girls who were a little more experienced, Kane and Dave took it in turns giving them individual coaching on wave selection and technique. By the end of the morning session everyone was out the back catching waves. Not bad for some of the girls first ever surf experience!

After lunch and nana naps (not very gang like I know) we were on the road for the East Coast. This was one of the real advantages about being based in Ahipara. The beaches of the east coast are pretty close also so it gave us heaps of options depending on the wind and swell. We headed to Coopers Beach

where Dave and Kane eloquently explained the reason the waves were crumbling due to the strong (and cold) onshore wind. We continued driving east to Taupo Bay and although also a messy onshore the waves were better. We mixed it up in the shore break with some of the girls battling it out through the white water for the waves out the back. It was a little shifty and there were a few more people in the water so it was a little more challenging. It wasn't the most perfect conditions but we spent a couple of hours honing up some of the skills we had learnt in our morning session. Sitting on the beach after the surf, Tania came in looking a little exhausted and we asked her how her surf had gone. Her reply had us all in hysterics as it went something like this. "I paddled out and I looked up and I was like, f@!! so I turtle rolled, came up and was like, f@!!, so I went to paddle for a wave and they were coming from all directions, and I was like f@!!, so I tried to catch something and I was like, f@!!. When my boyfriend calls later to ask me what I learnt today I'll tell him f@!! all!" It was the funniest thing we had heard especially considering Tania was surfing better than most of us!"

Unfortunately the rain continued to fall all afternoon and the wind never let up so we headed home to a feed of Chinese takeaways and tales of what people have seen in the emergency wards of hospitals. Everyone seemed to have a "friend" who worked in an emergency room who had tales of people coming in to have objects removed from their private parts. The worst being a woman who was stuck on the gear stick in her car! It didn't bear thinking about!

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Sunset Ahipara - image by Kane



Jo

The forecast for the next day was looking pretty grim so the boys suggested that if we were going to have a late night at all this should be the night. Following Emma and Kane's sun dance the drinking games began. It has been a long time since I have played drinking games so I snuck off early to bed, however, having the room closest to the lounge meant sleep was impossible. They seemed to play every game in the book and by the time they played "name this song" I was calling out answers from the comfort of my bed. The highlight of the night, however, was "I have never", the drinking game where you pretty much reveal all about what you have and have never done. The temptation to print all right here is almost too much, however, being a member of Hells Harem I am bound by secrecy.

DAY THREE

Despite the negative forecast we awoke to glassy 1-2ft swell and some to a mean hangover. The waves were great for longboarding and we surfed for hours right in front of Ahipara Surf Lodge. After a quick lunch it was back out for another session before heading south past Shipwreck Bay around the rocks to Mukies. Mukies, which is short for Mukerua offers waves which are sometimes twice the size of the Bay. The drive is a pretty tricky one through gaps in the reef but it gets you to some incredible breaks.

The waves were pretty small so instead we collected mussels off the rocks for dinner and went sand boarding down the huge sand dunes. Who needs Harley Davidson's when you can have a skim board and a 45 degree sloping sand dune? The technique was to come down face first as fast as you could. The speed record went to Ali who never slowed down until she came to a crash at the bottom of the dunes, almost taking out Tania in the process.

After plenty of laughs and with sand in every orifice we traded the face first technique for standing up. We moved down the slope slightly and managed to master the art of sand board surfing pretty quickly. A quick tip for those of you who ever try sand boarding is to keep your mouth shut! Opening your mouth wide to either holler in excitement or curse at a fall is not so sensible. Emma did just that and resurfaced with so much sand in her mouth she crunched every time she tried talking.

On the way home a few of us stopped for a surf in the bay at Shipwreck. It was pretty small but still fun and Dave spent most of his time pushing us into waves. At least it was one way to clean out the sand. A late dinner of Paela, complete with our own mussels gathered from the beach earlier topped off another magic day.

DAY FOUR

The day began around 5.30am with a dawn surf for some. We drove to Shipwreck Bay and back around the rocks to Mukies 2. Along the way perfect 3-4 foot lefthanders broke at every point. The wind was blowing a moderate south to south easterly so there was a bite in the air but the water was warm. We were back in time for breakfast followed by a bit of a "classroom" session on waves, rips and etiquette. We learned the unwritten rules about wave priority, snaking and the lineup, and had a rather heated discussion about what happens if "kooks" try to take a wave. For those of you not in the know, if you enter a line up and wait for your



Lunch compliments of Kane!



Suzie wishing this was a short board



The wetsuit race - won by Michelle



Michelle, all smiles



All the encouragement and coaching in the world cant stop Jo going over the falls!

HELLS HAREM



Alis sandboarding

turn, catch your wave and then fall off the chances of you getting another wave are gonna be pretty slim. The boys explained how it works a bit like a gang, where some locals will work together to box out another surfer making it impossible for them to get any waves. Being pretty close to "kook" status ourselves we were not too happy about this and Dave and Kane were lucky to make it out of that alive. It was then that we decided we needed our own surf chicks gang which Dave aptly named, "Hells Harem."

If anything is going to make you surf better it's a heated discussion, so the next session we were pretty fired up and improved heaps. We came in to the most amazing lunch spread out on the table like something you'd buy in a restaurant. We had not used all the mussels we had gathered the day before and Kane turned them into an incredible feed. Despite offers of bribes for the recipe it is still a secret, although I can reveal the key ingredients; mussels, sweet chillie, white wine, garlic, coconut cream and spring onions.

The sun finally came out so we spent the afternoon lazing in the sun and snoozing ready for our early evening surf at Mukies 1. The Harem dominated the lineup (OK we were the only ones out there so that did help) and had the best surf all week. The waves were peeling left off the point at a solid 3 foot and were perfect. The fast breaking wave was held by a light offshore creating perfect glassy conditions. The girls rocked! It was incredible the progress made by the group in such a short time. Everyone was catching unbroken waves and riding them to hollers of support from the rest of the group. It was the best surf session of the trip without a doubt.

As with any trip, time always seems to go slowly during the first half and then fly by way too quickly towards the end. It was our last night and we were all wishing we could stay for another week at least, sure we'd be nailing every wave with just a little more time.

As with each night there were the sensible who went to bed early and those of us who seemed to sit talking into the early hours of the morning. I am normally someone who needs at least 8 hours sleep

and I have not survived on so little sleep for such a long time and still been firing to go each morning. There's something therapeutic about being on a surf trip that seemed to keep me charged no matter how much sleep I got.

DAY FIVE

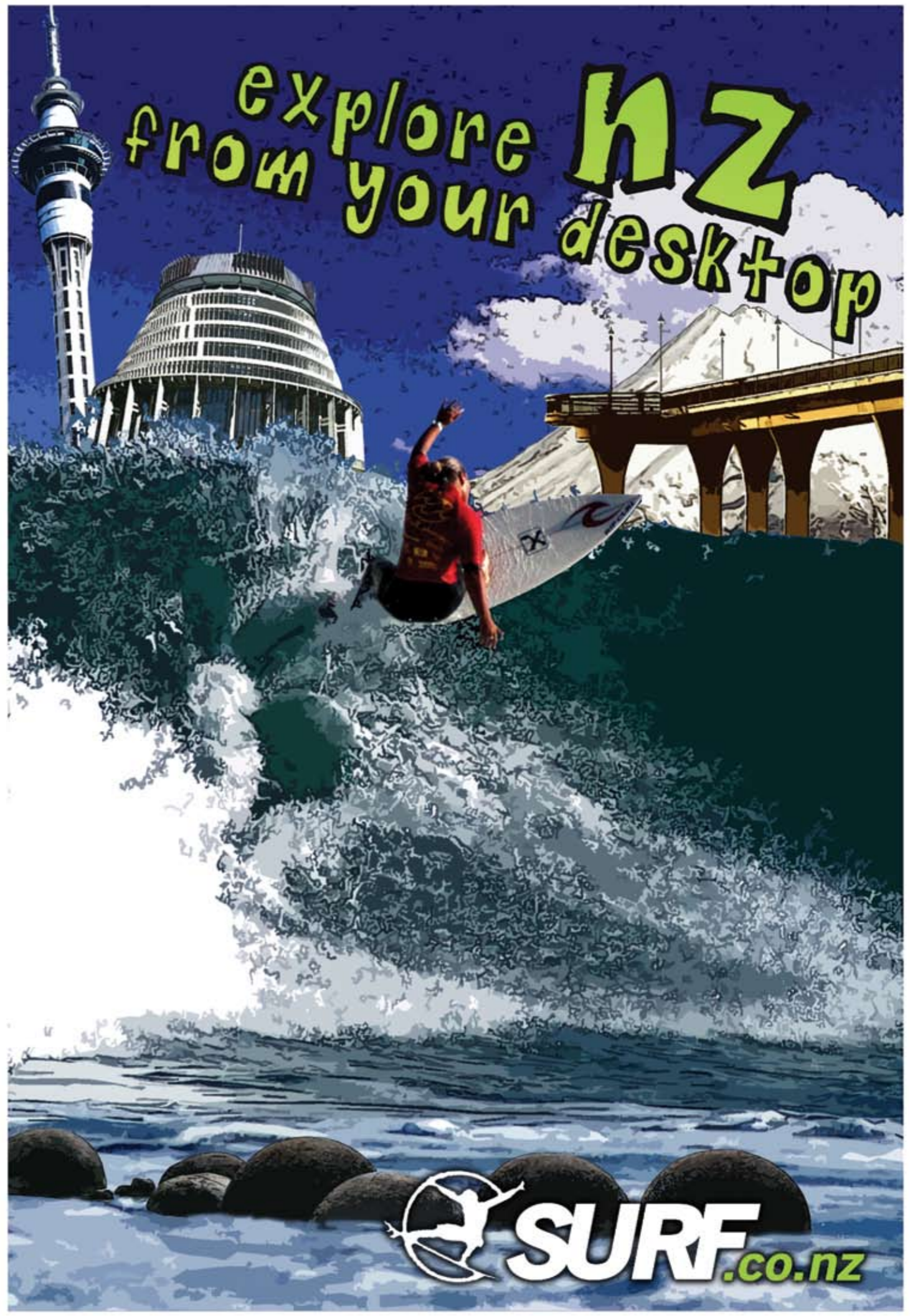
It sucked to be going home. The last morning was a bit of an anti climax. The week had been so good and the surf the night before epic, that we were bummed to wake up to almost flat conditions on the west coast. It was decided we would stop at Waipu Cove on the way home for our final surf. We arrived to find the Cove messy and onshore but thought after our week's experience we could handle ourselves fine. Most of us paddled out the back easy enough despite the stormy swell to be met with shifty unpredictable 3-4 foot sets.

As I paddled out I came across Tania paddling back in. She yelled across to me, "I just got f@!!ing hammered out there," but her message was lost in the noise of the swell. Once I was sitting out the back I sort of figured out what she had said. The waves were coming at you from all directions and there was a lot of water movement. Before I knew it I was a 100 or so metres further down the beach and making little progress so I decided to come in. After taking the first three or four sets smack on my head and even going over the falls twice I was feeling a little less confident.

With no one else around I ditched my board and swam for shore. I know you're supposed to hold onto your board at all costs but trust me this worked way better. I had to laugh though when I finally made it to shore to find the lifeguard watching me closely from the beach with her rescue tube firmly tucked under her arm very much in the "ready" position. I could see her visibly relax when I finally washed up in the shore break, bedraggled but safe.

It was the end of the adventure and time to say goodbye and head back to our "other lives". Most of the team were swapping their wetties for more corporate business attire and the daily drives to the surf for the daily drive in rush hour traffic.

Huge thanks to Judd and the team from NZ Surf Tours for a wonderful experience. ☺



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