

The Saturday Boarders of La Bocana

By Randy Jackson

They began meeting at La Bocana beach on Saturday mornings for boogie boarding more than a decade ago. Back then the only boards available around Huatulco were boards too small for an adult. Although that meant the rides, even on the biggest waves, were quite short, they had a taste of what great fun it is playing in the waves. They returned in subsequent seasons with boards more suited to their size, and their fun in the waves really began.

A boogie board is a trademark term for bodyboards, just as Kleenex is a trademark term for facial tissues. However, “boogie” in front of “board” is an indispensable descriptor of the use of the device, much as “magic” is a descriptor to the term “magic wand” (a wand in medieval English means stick). To “boogie” is to dance, whereas a bodyboard could mean something you lay a cadaver on. So, in the spirit of good clean fun, the Bocana Boarders prefer the term boogie board. And by adding “ing” to “board,” as in Boogie Boarding, it becomes an activity of jollification.

The origin of this activity is attributed to the indigenous peoples of Polynesia. A lesser-known fact in surfing history is that most early Polynesians lay prone on their boards, and only rarely were they observed standing up on them. The Polynesian term for this form of fun is *he'e nalu*, or “wave sliding.”

The Saturday Boarders of Bocana are a small non-elite group of gringo-pensioners. They are much less fearful of the waves than the possibility of developing neck wattles. But then again, the waves in the snowbird season are generally modest, not at all like the cresting turquoise four-meter waves off French Polynesia. In fact, the surfer term for the type of winter waves at La Bocana is “shoreys.” In Tahiti, shoreys are mostly used by the surfers' Swedish girlfriends to wash sand off their calves. To the Boarders of Bocana, however, shoreys are riotously more exciting than even the upward curve of bank stocks.

Like good surfers everywhere, the Saturday Boarders of Bocana have honed their skills using practiced techniques appropriate for the conditions. This type of boogie boarding requires one to stand in waist-to-chest-deep water, watching for the appropriate ocean swell that will break into a curl near one's standing position. Then, facing towards shore, they tuck the back end of the board into their waist while looking back over their shoulder at the rapidly forming wave. Then, just as the wave is about to break overhead, they leap shoreward onto their board, their momentum joining the force of the wave as it breaks.



Photo by Tamara Pluggers

From shore, the boarder's motion will appear to hesitate slightly as the wave crests. Then, tipping earthwards as the wave breaks, the boarder shoots downwards and disappears into the crashing water and foam of the breaking wave. It takes two or three seconds for the laws of physics to work out the boarder's fate. Spectators on shore hold their breath. Sometimes a riderless board is shot skyward (“oooh's” from the crowd). But, emerging from the wave-froth is the face of a skilled Bocana Boarder, grinning, out ahead of the wall of foam, careening towards the beach. The crowd cheers.

Oh, and the crowd? It's an imaginary one. The wives and friends of the Bocana Boarders are there each Saturday morning for the event, but not to watch it. Some stroll along the beach, others are busy with their fish tacos and beverages

at the restaurant. Alas, the Bocana Boarders' daring acts of athletic wave conquest are rarely witnessed.

A good ride ends when the board smooches to a stop on the sand, just centimeters from the highest wave mark. That wave delivering the boarder to the beach was a final bit of energy culminating from planetary forces of wind and gravity. While the earth spins at 107,000 kilometers per hour, the gravitational pull of the moon sloshes the oceans like pulling a beer keg out of a bathtub. But as oblivious to these cosmic forces as they are to farting in Walmart, the Bocana Boarder rises from the beach, tucks his board under his arm, and heads back into the oncoming waves.

Yet in this dimension, where time exists, the fun in the waves must inevitably end. So while galaxies rotate, supernovas explode, and nebulas coalesce, there on the edge of a continent, on this blue spinning planet, the Saturday Boarders of La Bocana leave barefoot tracks from the water's edge, with a promise of fish burgers and later the open-mouthed oblivion of an afternoon nap.

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