

# SURFING ILLUSTRATED

A Visual Guide to Wave Riding



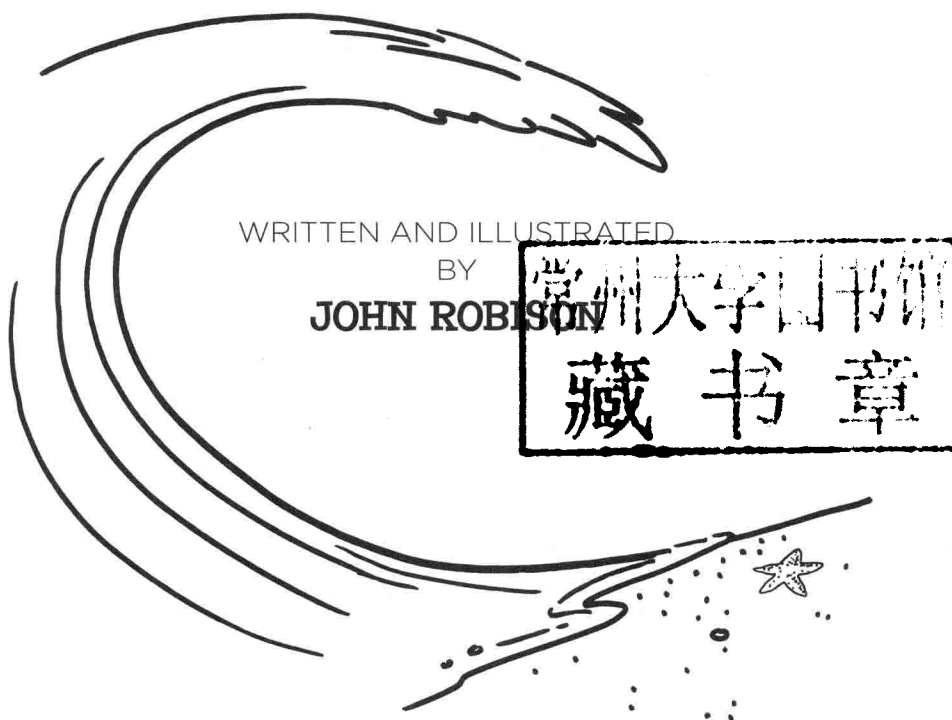
**John Robison**

Author of *Sea Kayaking Illustrated*



# Surfing Illustrated

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO WAVE RIDING



INTERNATIONAL MARINE / McGRAW

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DEDICATED TO MY MOM,  
WHO ENCOURAGED ME TO  
GO FOR THE BIG WAVES.

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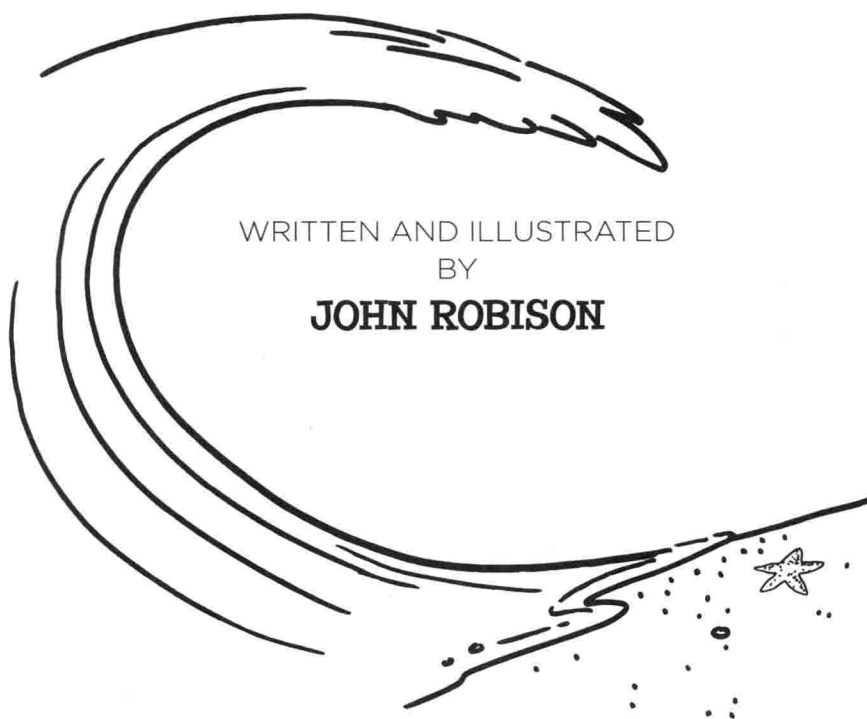
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WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED  
BY  
**JOHN ROBISON**



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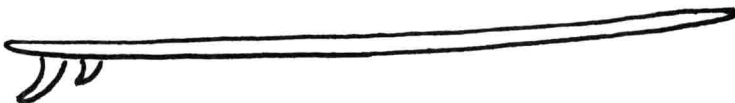
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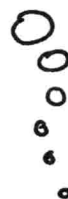
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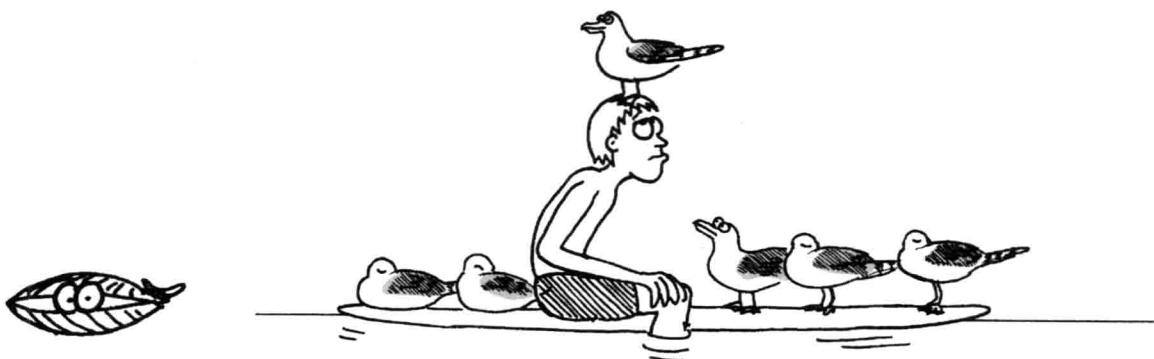




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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book is a lot like learning to surf. The vast majority of the time you are flailing with no end in sight. You rely on your friends for advice and encouragement. But when you catch a wave and stand up, or see that your work helped someone else stand up, you realize it is all worth it.

I would like to thank the folks who helped make this book a reality. First, I'd like to thank Ed Guzman with Club Ed Surf School in Santa Cruz, California. Ed has spent his career teaching people how to surf and offered his sage advice throughout the writing of this book. I highly recommend his surf lessons and surf camps to anyone who wants to learn from the best (see Club-Ed.com). Rocky Snyder, author of *Fit to Surf*, also pointed me in the right direction to start the research for this book. Cary Smith, Deputy Harbormaster with Pillar Point Harbor, Half Moon Bay, California, contributed to the section on surf rescues. My longtime surfing buddies Joe Archibald, Sean Baker, and Julian Meisler all offered excellent suggestions based on their years of experience.

Tony and Lib Johnson of Mr. Surfs Surf Shop, in Panama City Beach, Florida, showed some real aloha spirit and gave me some great standup paddleboard tips. And thanks to the good folks at YOLO boards (yoloboard.com) for letting me try their newest standup paddleboards.

Special thanks to Bob Penuelas, the cartoonist of the terrific Wilbur Kookmeyer series (wilbur-kookmeyer.com), for being a longtime inspiration to me.

Thanks yet again to Bob Holtzman, Jon Eaton, and Molly Mulhern with International Marine/McGraw-Hill for all their help and patience in transforming my surf scribbles into this book. Fellow inland surfer Marcy Westover provided some good yoga tips.

My wife Angel has earned a big smooch and a squeeze for putting up with me throughout this process. Now we can continue with our mini-adventures!





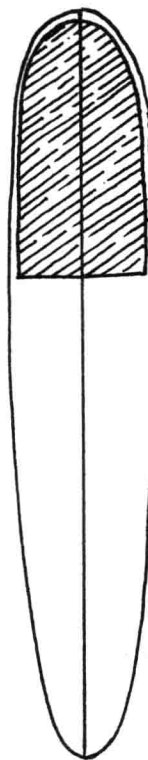


## PREFACE

The word “stoked” is a surfing term used to describe “a profound state of enthusiasm” for something, usually a wave or a surf session or something else exciting. As my friends can attest, I am extremely enthusiastic about surfing. Like so many high school students, I was reprimanded regularly for doodling cartoons of epic tube rides in class. Despite my awe-inspiring, imaginary maneuvers, I did not grow up to be a professional surfer. I am just one of countless intermediate surfers who are incredibly stoked every time they get in the water and go surfing.

My goal is to share my sense of stoke with other folks out there. Yes, the waves can be crowded and this book may make the waves even more crowded. But my hope is that readers will use the tips in this book to be safer in the water, to use proper etiquette to better share the waves, and to take better care of our coastal environment.

The environmental problems suffered by our oceans and coastlines are not as bad as they appear. They are worse. We will not take better care of these special places until we have a personal stake in restoring them. I am donating a portion of the royalties to conservation groups like the Surfrider Foundation and encourage anyone who appreciates the magic of water to support their excellent work.





## INTRODUCTION

If you've ever had the inkling that you wanted to try surfing, then consider this book as your official invitation to get started.

Although surfing may look like a lot of fun, until you try it you have no concept of how amazingly fun it really is. Catching a wave is simply one of the best sensations in life. I'm talking about ear-to-ear grins and an inability to paddle back to shore without "just one more wave." The classic slang surfer word "stoked" is often used to describe this emotion.

After that sales pitch, I would be remiss if I did not also tell you that surfing is one of the hardest sports to learn. To accomplish some state of proficiency, you will need to spend several weeks, or even months, of consistent water time in good learning conditions. Although nothing can beat real time on the water, this book can tell you what to expect before you hit the waves, how to take full advantage of your first session in the water, and what to work on for your next session.

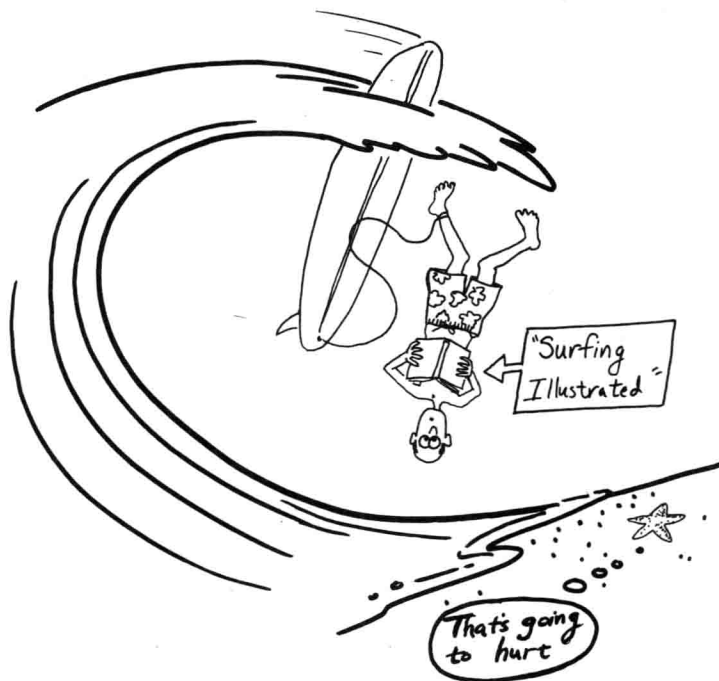
**Learning to surf is a mixture of respect, timing, balance, boldness, and humility, with bits of pure elation thrown into the mix.** As a beginning

surfer, you learn something new every time you go out. Even if you have only a few hours to give it a try, and only manage to belly-ride a 1-foot-high wave, surfing can still be a worthwhile experience. And once you stand up and start gliding across a wave, the fun factor increases exponentially.

### A Word on Safety

There's the standard disclaimer in the beginning of this book releasing the author, publisher, and distributor from any liability in case of sunburn, shark attack, jellyfish in swimsuits, dismemberment, death, and just plain drowning. This warning is worth reemphasizing here.

The ocean is the Boss. The ocean can seem playful at times and angry at other times, but ultimately it is completely uncaring about whether or not you get hurt. Don't expect Mother Ocean to send emissaries of graceful dolphins to rescue you if you get caught in a rip current or lose your board. If you are not sure you should go out, that's a giant red neon sign that you shouldn't go out. The waves are always bigger when you're out there. It is better to be on the shore wishing you



were in those waves than in those waves wishing you were on shore.

Although it is always best to surf with someone else for safety, don't rely on the lifeguard or your surf buddy to rescue you. You are ultimately on your own. Unlike other sports such as rock climbing, mountain biking, or skiing, with surfing it can be extremely hard for other folks to notice you're in trouble, get to you in time, and do something when they get there. Reading this book is no substitute for taking surfing lessons, checking conditions before you go out, and surfing within your limits.

Surfing is a full-immersion watersport. Even though you expect to spend most of your time on or connected to your board, it is just as important to know what to do when you are off or separated from your board. Strong swimming and ocean skills are critical. The best way to strengthen your swimming skills is first in a pool and then under calm conditions in open water.

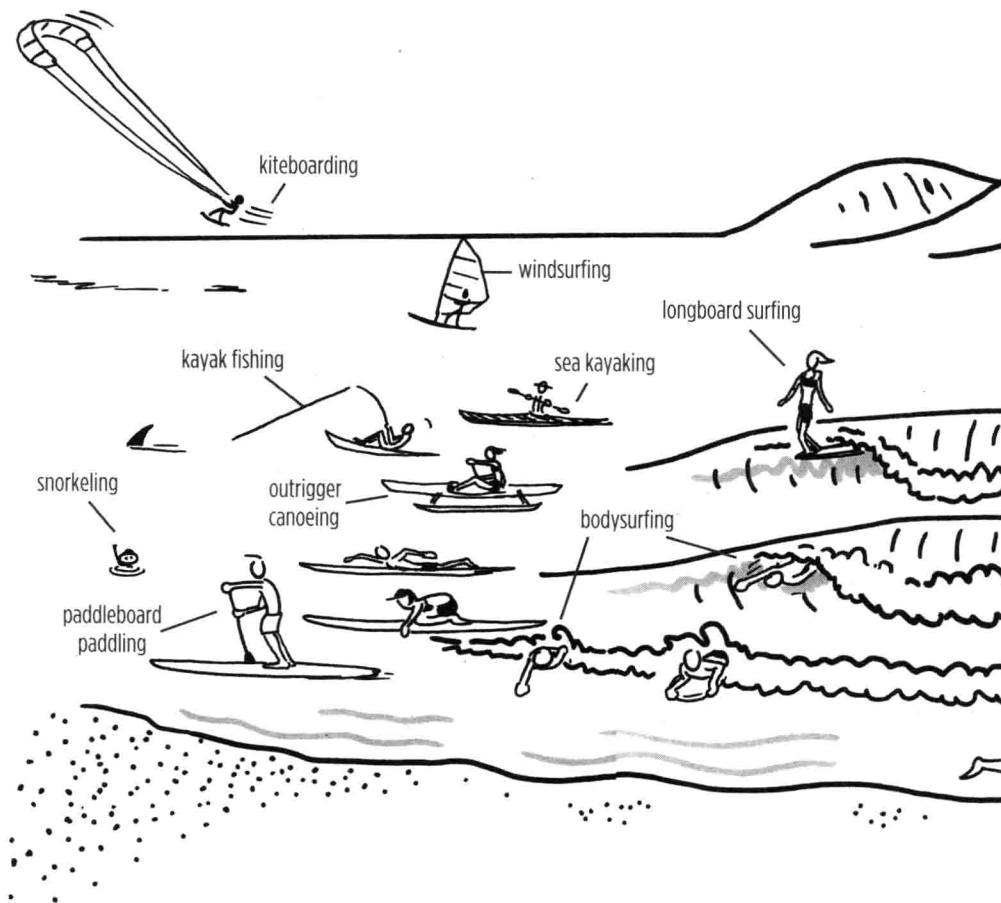
Having said all that, water is pretty soft and forgiving. You should not be overly afraid of wiping out or getting tossed around, because that is where the real learning occurs.

See you in the water!

*John Robison*



# Surfing, Surfboards, and Surfers

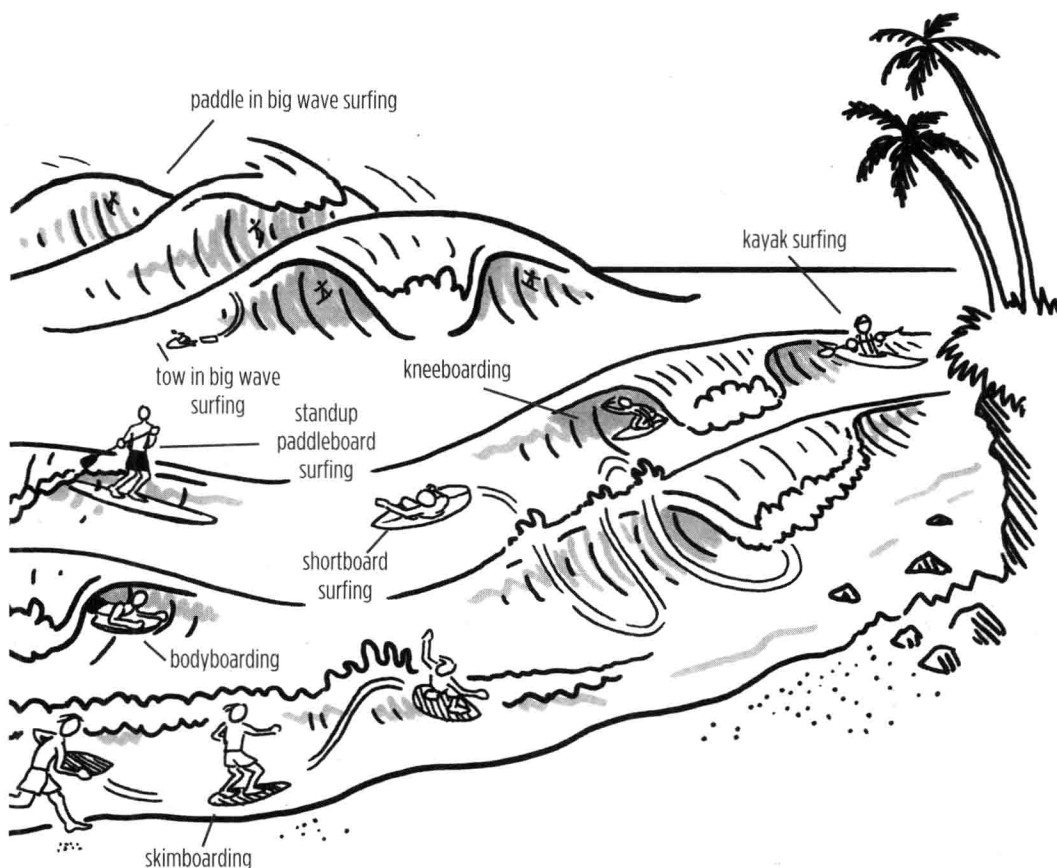


No matter what your interests or abilities, the coast can be a fantastic playground. First and foremost is surfing with a surfboard. Surfing can also mean sliding any type of craft (a surfboard, boogie board, or even just your body) down the face

of a wave. But if the waves are too small for surfing, you can still go for a swim, paddle a paddleboard, outrigger canoe, or sea kayak, or go fishing. If the wind is too strong for surfing, you can try sailing, boardsailing, or kiteboarding. If the water visibility

"Listen: when someone tells me he or she wants to learn the athleticism, the art, of surfing, my first reaction is invariably, 'careful, it can change everything.' "

—Allan C. Weisbecker, *In Search of Captain Zero*



is good, you can go snorkeling or scuba diving. If the waves are too big, there is always shell collecting, relaxing, sand castle construction and demolition with the kids, as well as sex on the beach (the cocktail, that is). The more watersports you try,

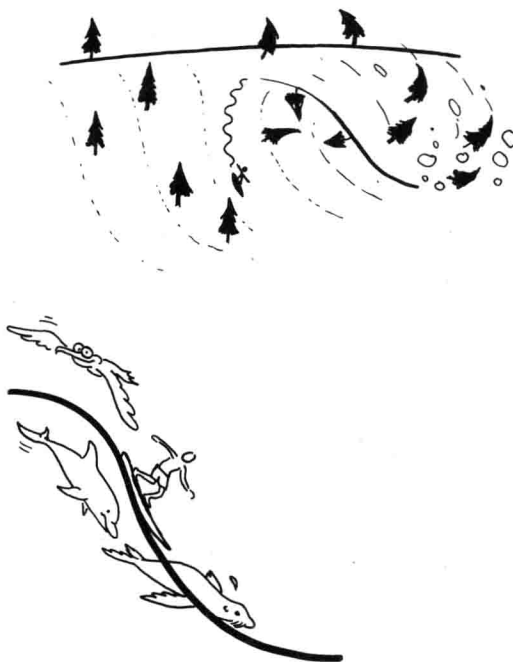
the better an overall surfer you become. The most respected surfers are proficient in a wide variety of surfing, from bodysurfing to outrigger canoe surfing to kiteboarding. **So with all these other options, why surf? Because it's simply the most fun you can have.**

## HOW SURFING WORKS

To really appreciate surfing, it helps to understand a little bit about the physics of what's going on.

### Gravity Sports: It's All Downhill from Here

Surfing is a gravity sport like downhill skiing or snowboarding, with the added excitement that the entire hill is moving with you. Mere humans are newcomers to the sport of surfing. Dolphins and sea lions are the real experts and can surf waves underwater, and pelicans can surf across the updraft on the face of a cresting wave.



### Planing

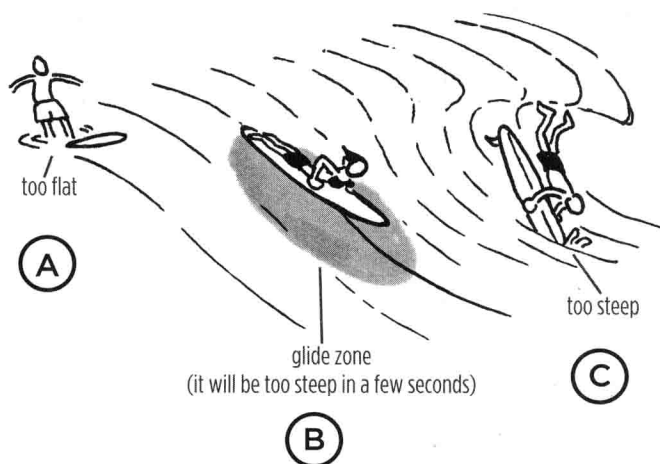
Most surfboards are not buoyant enough to support an upright person in flatwater without sinking, so how is it that surfers are able to stand up and skim across the surface of a moving wave? The difference between skipping a stone and plinking a pebble is speed across the surface of the water.

With enough speed, even large objects like water-skiers and jetboats stop plowing through

the water and start skimming or planing across the surface.

Instead of using a motor, surfers use the speed generated by gravity as they drop down the slope of a moving wave. Unlike a ski hill, a wave slope can change from too flat to too steep in a few seconds, so timing and placement are critical.





## Finding the Glide Zone

The **glide zone** is a constantly moving area where it is steep enough (but not too steep) for your surfboard to start planing (surfer B). The idea is to sprint shoreward until the glide zone of a wave appears underneath you. If you stand up too soon, before the wave steepens enough, you will sink like a water-skier behind a boat that has run out of gas (surfer A). If you are trying to catch a wave that is too steep for your surfboard, the surfboard will nosedive, or **pearl**, sending you end over end (surfer C).

## Catching Waves

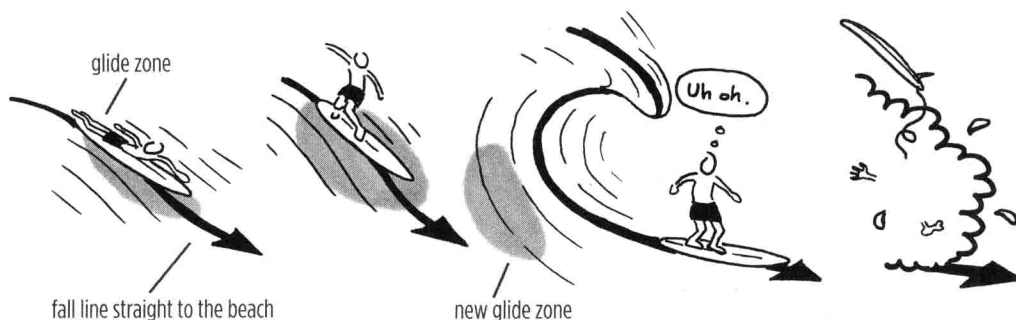
Instead of thinking about catching the wave, think about the wave catching up with you. With practice, you will be able to position yourself so the glide zone appears directly beneath you just as the wave catches up with you.

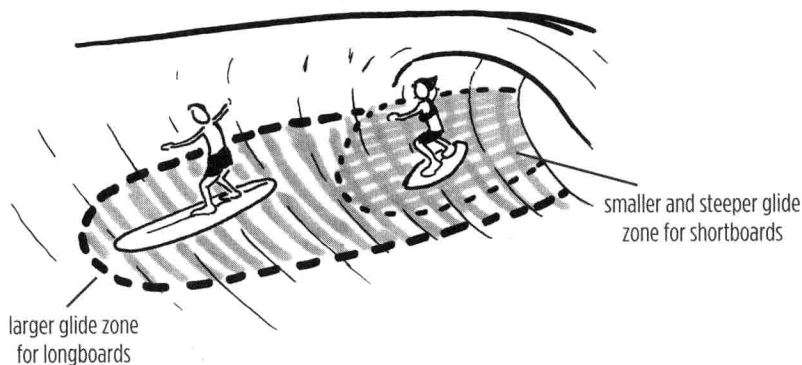
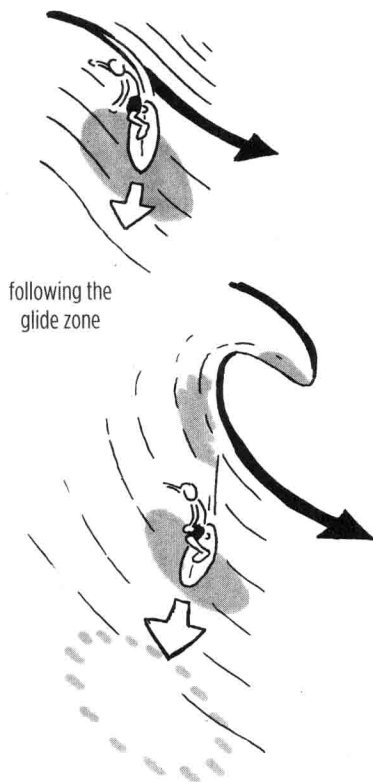


## Dropping In

Once you succeed in paddling into the glide zone and standing up (this may take some time), you need to figure out what to do next. If you keep your board pointed straight toward shore, you will speed ahead of the wave into the **flats**, where

the avalanche of whitewater behind you will soon catch up. Although making **drops** is great fun, the rides are short, and this routine can become tiring after a while.



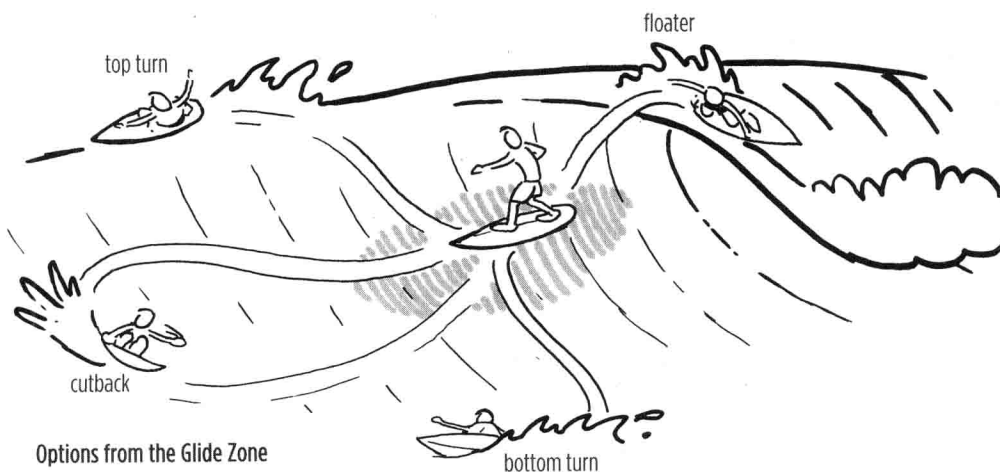


## Trimming and The Glide

For longer rides you need to choose a wave that breaks gradually from one end to the other (**peels**) so a new glide zone keeps forming to the side. If you point your board toward this new glide zone, you can enjoy a much longer ride.

**Trimming** is when you line up your board so it stays in the glide zone all the way down the line, also known as **The Glide**. When conditions are right, surfers can ride diagonally across a wave face for a mile or more.

Although being in trim is great, from the glide zone you also can sprint out into the flats for a **bottom turn** (see Chapter 6, page 140), launch up the wave crest for an **off-the-lip** (see page 149), or carve out to the shoulder and back for a **roundhouse cutback** (see Chapter 6, page 149). But always, at some point, you have to come back through the glide zone to regain your speed.





## BEFORE YOU GRAB YOUR SURFBOARD

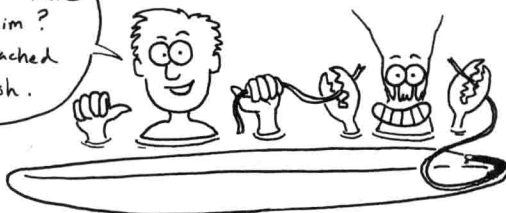
There are several basic ocean skills you should be comfortable with before you grab a surfboard.

### Swim Practice

Even though you may plan on doing all your stroking while on a surfboard, you need to be comfortable swimming in the ocean without a surfboard in case you become separated from your surfboard. Although you don't have to be an Olympic swimmer to surf (but it helps!), you should be able to swim in a pool for at least thirty minutes and tread water for twenty minutes without difficulty. It is perfectly okay to take a touch-up swim lesson to improve your efficiency.

Once your flutter kick is fluttering and your crawl is more than crawling, you should gain some experience swimming in the ocean next to the shore in mild conditions. In general, though, places to surf don't make good places to swim. So before you go, read Chapter 2 about rip currents and check with a lifeguard for recommendations!

What do you mean I have to know how to swim?  
My surfboard is attached to me with this leash.



### Dealing with Waves by Ducking (and Not Diving)

Once you've found a good swimming spot, the next step is to become comfortable with the ins and outs of the shore break. The shore break can change from a Class I to a Class V rapid and back again in just a few seconds, so time your entry and exit to avoid the waves. As you wade out and encounter an oncoming wave, you can either stand sideways on your tiptoes to pass through it, duck under it, or just act like a tourist and let it smack you. Once the water is too deep or the waves are too big to wade through, the safest option is to duck underwater and swim under the turbulence. If you choose to, you can do a low-speed, sinking belly flop and then swim to the bottom. Never dive if there might be any obstacles (such as the bottom) to bump into with your head or torso.

