

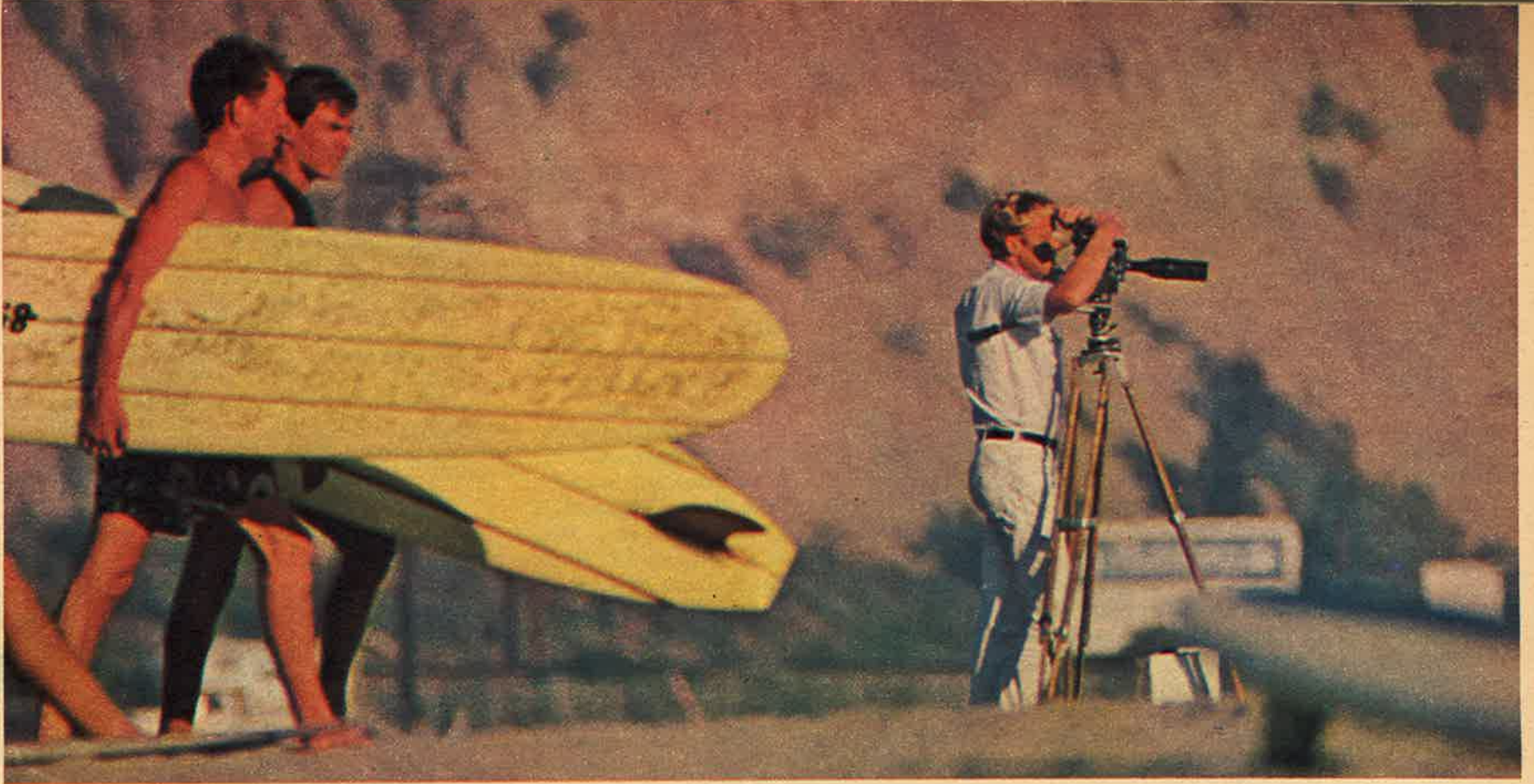
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- A Split-Level Earthquake in
- The Dominoes Theory of C
- Conglomerates, New Rage
- Bruce Brown and an 'Endle





Pursuing an 'Endless Summer'

by PATRICK McNULTY

Bruce Brown sat on the bed under the bare electric light, polishing the lens of a 16-mm. movie camera. A Kona wind wafted through a broken window, and outside on the beach electric guitars played *Lovely Hula Hands* at a tourist luau near the old *Outrigger*. Glancing up, Brown noticed a covey of cockroaches scurrying toward a crack in the door jamb. One of the roaches intrigued Brown. It was bigger than the others, a Paul Bunyan of roachdom.

Walking to the wall, Brown deftly pinched the cockroach between thumb and forefinger and strolled into the hall, where a worker had left a brush and can of blue paint. Carefully, Brown painted the giant cockroach blue and then put it back with the herd.

"I had a great time that winter in the Islands," Brown remembers, "surfing, shooting my first surf movie and watching my blue cockroach. We became great friends."

That was nine years and a million dollars ago. The room cost \$18 a month. The cockroaches were free—as was a generous supply of smaller fellow travelers in the mattress. Brown was fresh out of the U.S. Navy submarine service and getting started as a documentary film maker. He was on a tight budget and his money mostly went into film and gas for a battered sedan that he drove around Oahu, chasing surf to places like Makaha and Sunset Beach.

Those lean years, happily, are gone for the young, blonde movie maker. After several years of turning out surfing films for a lecture tour, Brown has hit the mother lode of surfing gold. His *The Endless Summer*, an honestly-told documentary about two California surfers' quest for the perfect wave, has become the

Gone With The Wind for the surfing set. The 91-minute documentary is setting attendance records in such unlikely surfing hot spots as Toronto, Pittsburgh and New York City. *Variety*, the show business Bible, predicts at least a \$6,000,000 gross for the film that Brown shot on a \$50,000 Hollywood-sized shoestring.

Brown travels first-cabin now and rarely runs into cockroaches. But if he does get nostalgic for the old days of blue bugs and cheap Waikiki hotel rooms, he can afford all the cockroaches he wants—flown in from Abercrombie & Fitch, in any color he chooses, gold-plated, or even dipped in chocolate. In short, Brown has arrived.

But success certainly hasn't spoiled Brown, whose movie career began just a few years ago with a battered \$20 movie camera and nickels and dimes collected from friends to buy film. That was when Brown was growing up on Alamitos Bay near Long Beach where he grew to love the sea and outdoor life. And the shower of movie gold hasn't changed him. He prefers roaming the hills near his Dana Point home on a Scrambler motorcycle to attending any of the drum-beating publicity cocktail parties and receptions. He would rather go out with old friend Hank Boyd on his 47-foot *Orca* fishing boat than guest star, as he has several times, on television shows hosted by Johnny Carson, Merv Griffin, Hugh Downs and Mike Douglas. He's much more at home trading jokes over coffee and doughnuts with Herb McPhee, owner of the nine-stool Mac's Coffee Break—the Toots Shor's of Dana Point—than making small talk over Scotch neat with the real Toots in New York.

Brown lives in the quiet ocean community with his wife, Pat, and three small children. Their home is perched on the edge of a cliff dropping 200 feet to the Pacific. The front yard offers a magnificent view of the historic Dana Point headland and the cove where, 100 years ago, Richard Henry Dana, aboard the brig *Pilgrim*, anchored during his *Two Years Before the Mast*.

Like Brown, Dana Point is quiet and unpretentious—just the way he likes it. It is 60 freeway miles from the tinsel and glamour of Hollywood. Most people drive into Dana Point on the main highway and keep right on going south to San Diego. Many of the Dana Point residents live there—as Brown does—because they have an intense affection for the sea and the outdoor life. As Brown puts it:

"The people here are genuine . . . they're real. You know, if it's cold they shiver and if it's hot they take off their shirts. They're not trying to be something they're not, and I like that quality because I'm not trying to be anything I'm not either."

And yet, Bruce Brown is difficult to categorize. He's many things, really: movie-maker, lecturer, television personality, husband, father, and an enthusiastic outdoorsman whose pastimes include hunting, surfing, sailing, big game fishing, hiking, camping, motorcycle riding. He has a great capacity for work and for play—especially play. While on a movie project, Brown can work hours in his office—a barefooted, two-block stroll from his home. But when the surf's up, the day is sunny, or there is a fresh northwesterly blowing off the Pacific—well, the office is probably the last place you'd

Surfing film impresario Bruce Brown trains his long lens seaward like some mariner's telescope, left, to record surfing action off a Southern California beach. At right, Brown's home in Dana Point, from which, far right, he can see if the surf's up.



When the surf's up, the day is sunny, or there is a fresh northwesterly blowing off the Pacific—well, the office is probably the last place you'd find Bruce Brown . . .

find Bruce Brown. On a day like that he'd be off with a surfboard, motorcycle, sailing catamaran or one of his two fishing boats.

A columnist once described Brown as a modern-day Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer, and certainly Bruce has much in common with those Mark Twain heroes. Bruce would fit in with Huck and Tom floating on that raft down the Mississippi. Or even better, he'd probably talk them into taking a ride over the hills on one of his motorcycles, spending a day surfing at one of the beaches near his home, or maybe cruising offshore in the Pacific in the *Orca* trying to stick a spear in a dozing broadbill.

Brown became addicted to the water and outdoor life at an early age. His father, Dana, is an avid weekend sailor. Bruce grew up around small boats and as a youngster once crewed in the Olympic trials in San Francisco Bay. When he was 10-years-old he came in second in the World Contest for 8-foot sabots. Brown got his first surfboard—a heavy, old-style redwood—when he was a skinny 12 year old.

"I'd get up every day about six o'clock in the morning just to paddle that board—I was crazy about surfing even then," said Brown.

Brown soon got a lighter, faster balsa board and went after the Pacific waves in earnest. A year or two later he picked up his first movie camera. Like many youngsters along the California coast, Brown was "stoked" on surfing—then in its infancy as a popular sport.

"I'd save up to buy film—sometimes waiting weeks to get enough for one roll," Brown said. "A lot of my surfing pals frequently chipped in on film. I'd run down to the camera store, buy a

roll and we'd be off to some nearby beach to get some surfing pictures."

These early surfing epics were shown in a garage or the front room of friends where the mothers would donate a sheet for a screen and after the show Brown sometimes passed the hat to get money for more film. It was, as they say in Hollywood, strictly low budget.

That was the beginning of Brown's career as a movie-maker: a \$20 camera, enough nickels and dimes to buy the film and a great love for surfing and the outdoor life. Brown became more interested in surfing and photography when, as a seaman aboard the submarine *USS Gudgeon*, he spent two years in Hawaii. Brown tried out his California skills on the Island's celebrated big surf at Makaha and Sunset Beach. He also spent some of his Navy pay on photographic equipment and started to learn—by trial and error—the trade of a movie photographer. After his two-year stint in the Navy, Brown returned to California and a lifeguard job in San Clemente, where he also worked nights in a surfboard shop. The owner, Dale Velzy, had a great idea to promote his surfboard business: send Bruce to the Islands to make a promotional movie. So Bruce and Dale tramped to a nearby camera shop and Velzy dazzled Brown by plunging for an entire outfit: 16-mm. Bolex, several telephoto lenses and even a flashy leather case to carry it in. Brown was off to the Islands and a career had begun.

Brown's first movie was, he admits now, quite crude. It was about the Hawaiian big surf, the giant 25-foot combers that daredevil big wave riders challenge every winter off Oahu's north shore. Brown spliced the picture together and

took it on a lecture tour of Southern California high school auditoriums.

There was no budget for a professional sound track, so Brown, then 20, appeared in person to describe the action. Basically shy, Brown admits he was close to terror when he faced his first live audience . . . a Southern California junior college auditorium packed with teen-age surfers.

Walking out on the stage, Brown decided to meet the situation with characteristic Brown honesty.

"I've never made a film before. This is my first. Also I've never appeared in public before an audience."

Silence.

"Now, I've made a movie about surfing the big waves in Hawaii at places like Makaha and Sunset Beach and I think the picture is pretty good. Of course, it's never been seen by anyone except me . . . and my dog, Red. He has seen it a lot while I was editing it . . . and my dog—why he likes it."

Laughter. The wry sense of humor that was to become a trademark of Brown's films was off and running.

So was Brown's career. For the next five years he built an increasingly successful lecture tour for surfing films. The formula was usually this: he would take one of the stars of the sport to the Hawaiian Islands and the big surf shots would be the nucleus of a picture embroidered with other surfing areas in California, and later Australia and New Zealand.

Every year Brown returned to the Mainland and spliced together a surfing movie that he'd show to the growing surfing clan in California.

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A photograph of the "perfect wave" that Bruce Brown discovered during the filming of his motion picture, "Endless Summer," was taken off the coast of South Africa.

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As his fame spread so did his audience: Hawaii, the East Coast, and later Australia and New Zealand. His technique also improved and he put together one sound track with an original musical background by the Bud Shank jazz combo. After six films on the lecture tour, Brown decided to go for broke.

"I've always felt," Brown said, "that an endless summer would be the ultimate for a surfer. It's really simple to cross the equator during our winter and find summer in the Southern Hemisphere. I thought how lovely just to travel slowly around the world following summer to places like Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti and Hawaii—and finally back to California."

The stars of the movie were two California surfers, Mike Hynson and Robert August—and an unexpected guest star: The Perfect Wave. The perfect wave, which is every surfer's Holy Grail, turned up unexpectedly off a craggy point in South Africa. The spot—Cape St. Francis—is now famous in surfing lore.

"For a surfer," Brown said, "the perfect wave is formed with just the right steepness . . . it breaks progressively at a steady speed . . . it's just fast enough so your surfboard stays right in the 'curl' or breaking section—just ahead of the white water."

But before they could be off chasing an endless summer there were problems. Since the film was shot on a Hollywood-sized shoestring, saving money was a big item. Baggage was the first problem. The airlines were not overjoyed when Brown, Hynson and August showed up lugging 10-foot surfboards. "What are you going to do with this thing?" was a frequent reaction from airline baggage clerks.

The 10-foot boards each took up 30 pounds of airline overseas luggage space, leaving only 10 pounds each for the rest of the surfers' gear, plus Brown's 100 pounds of film and cameras. Brown wasn't about to pay that excess baggage charge, so he divided up the camera gear among his stars and they carried it on the plane.

"We would wait until everybody had boarded the plane and the airline began paging us for the last time: 'Hynson, Brown, August for the last call . . . Hynson, Brown, August.' Then we'd run like mad through the gate carrying all the gear and it was too late for them to say much except give us a dirty look. We had only to pay for the excess baggage once—from New York to Senegal. It cost us over \$300, which on our tight budget we had planned to use for the first month's expenses."

Brown quickly had another financial shock: Africa's high cost of living. The letter he wrote home from his first stop in Dakar was hardly the kind most movie tycoons sent back to their wives:

" . . . We are staying at the Hotel N'Gor. It costs 4,700 African

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francs a night (\$20), and everything is extra—and I mean everything. A cup of coffee costs a dollar. We just finished dinner and had the cheapest thing—the bill was \$17. The only thing that's free is French bread so we have been heavy on the French bread. The only thing that makes it bearable is there just happens to be surf at the entrance to the bay in front of the hotel—4- to 8-foot tubes!! Water about 70 degrees and it was glassy all day today."

This was the beginning of a trek through Africa that included stops at Ghana, Nigeria and finally South Africa and that perfect wave off Cape St. Francis, and then Australia, Tahiti and Hawaii.

When Bruce got back to his California headquarters, he had been gone three and a half months. He had 50,000 feet, or roughly nine miles of 16-mm. color film. This was 24 hours of footage of the trip and it was quite a job to cut down to the 91 minutes of the finished 35-mm. version. Bruce not only did the photography but also the cutting and editing. Interspliced into the film was footage of Hawaiian big surf at Waimea and Sunset, famous breaks. Bruce had made a total of six trips to the Islands to capture the Hawaiian segment of the film.

Brown took the 16-mm. print of *The Endless Summer* on a lecture tour and the surfing aficionados greeted it enthusiastically. The picture for a surfing lecture film was a breakthrough; for the first time an around-the-world scope had been introduced to a movie made entirely for surfers, fed up with the corny Hollywood approach to their sport. Also *The Endless Summer* combined some of the better aspects of the travelogue with side trips to African game preserves and a wry Brown commentary on such items of interest to surfers as the price of gas in Ghana and the size of bikinis in Australia.

Bruce thought the film was good enough for a nationwide release and so Bruce's friend, fellow-surfer and business associate, R. Paul Allen, went back to New York to try and sell it. Allen was greeted with monumental indifference. Everyone agreed it was a good picture but "not commercial" and one distributor said:

"Nice try, kid, but it won't sell 10 miles from the water."

So Allen asked the distributor to suggest an acid test. Where is the toughest town to break in a picture about water sports? The distributors put their cigars together and then one of them pointed to a map: Wichita, Kansas.

"If a picture about surfing can draw in Wichita—it can draw anywhere," a distributor said.

So *The Endless Summer* went to Wichita. Allen had to import special equipment from Chicago to project the 16-mm. print. He rented a theater, after putting up a hefty guarantee to the theater owner. The picture opened during a snowstorm and the temperature was 2 degrees above zero.

The result? Boffo, as they say in show biz. For a two-week period, the film outgrossed the theater's two previous heavyweight attractions, *The Great Race* and *My Fair Lady*. So back Allen went to New York but still the distributors weren't sold on a surfing movie packing them in throughout the nation.

"We were discouraged, but we still believed in the film, whether it was commercial or not," Brown said. "We decided to go ahead and

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Movie-maker Bruce Brown speeds along a country road near his home in Dana Point with his sons Wade, 4, up front and Dana, 7, behind him on his sports motorcycle. For jaunts at sea, Brown can fall back on a catamaran, one of two fishing boats and a surf board. He also owns a Mercedes and a Jeep.

Bruce has much in common with Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer; he'd fit in with them floating down the Mississippi. Or even better, he'd probably talk them into taking a ride on his motorcycles, or spending a day surfing.

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blow the film up to 35-mm. and if necessary distribute it on a limited basis ourselves. I put everything I owned into hock and borrowed the money for the blowup. After spending two years putting the picture together, we spent another six months preparing the 35-mm. version . . ."

Allen took the finished print back to New York and rented the Kips Bay Theater in Lower Manhattan. The theater owner was skeptical and Allen had to put up \$7,000 for two weeks' rental and \$9,000 more for the first week's advertising. It was quite a gamble, but Brown felt it was necessary because "New York was the only place we could prove once and for all that *The Endless Summer* was commercial."

The picture opened off Broadway last June during a heat wave when, Brown recalls happily, many New Yorkers wanted nothing better than to duck into an air-cooled theater and watch frolicking surfers. The film received good reviews, some poetically referring to the blond Californian as "the Bergman of the boards," "the Fellini of the foam." A distributor bought the film for a coast-to-coast release and the picture has recently opened in Los Angeles. Brown was on his way toward his first million.

But Brown found out that success has its drawbacks, especially the personal appearance tour. He suffered every time he had to hop a plane for an opening in Toronto, San Francisco, Dallas. He'd much prefer spending the time with his family and pastimes: motorcycles, surfboards, camping, fishing.

When he recently returned from a premiere in Montreal, Brown quickly snapped off his snap-on tie and hung up his one and only suit—a three-year-old flannel he had bought off the rack at Brooks Brothers. He climbed into blue jeans and sweatshirt and was off with his fishing buddy, Hank Boyd, for a shakedown cruise aboard his new 47-foot *Orca*.

Brown took his wife, Pat and the kids. Boyd had along his wife, Shirley, and the small Boyd fishermen, Bobby, 10, and Mary, 8. They anchored for the night in the lee of Catalina. The dinner was martinis, steaks and fresh frozen strawberries from the boat's 18-ton freezer hold. The next day they poked around the windward side of Catalina, set a few nets for sea bass and then reluctantly put the boat into port at Oceanside. During the shakedown Brown spotted a couple of gray whales but no sign of his latest fishing and movie subject—the fighting broadbill. When the season opens in June, Brown and Boyd aboard the *Orca* will begin filming a movie about harpooning these fierce, often dangerous, game fish that abound in every ocean in the world.

"I'd like to do a sort of true version of *The Old Man and the Sea*," Brown said. "It would be about two young men who go after broadbill on this boat . . . about what they see, what it's really like out there . . . whales, the sea and the freedom of being out on the ocean for days . . . and the challenge and triumph of taking a big, fighting broadbill. And there'd be humor, too, about catching turtles down in Mexico during a 'shore leave' . . . and the things fishermen talk about when they're anchored in the cove off San Clemente Island . . . I'd like to get it all on film, honestly and without any gimmicks."

After that Brown has many projects planned. One in the back of his mind is to make a documentary about two young adventurers who ride motorcycles from California to the tip of the Baja peninsula. Just to check it out, Brown and a buddy, Del Cannon, drove down the Mexican peninsula, which is more desolate than many of the African spots Brown roamed for his round-the-world summer. Brown and Cannon spent three weeks bumping 1,100 rugged miles. But they didn't come back with many pictures because the bikes vibrated so much that frequently when Brown opened his bag every nut and bolt was loose in the camera housing. The Baja motorcycle trip, if filmed, will require special camera equipment.

But whatever Brown does he wants to do it in his own way. The success of *The Endless Summer*, inevitably, has opened many Hollywood doors. But Brown doesn't want to go through any except on his own terms. He remains that rare breed in the motion-picture business, or any business for that matter: The success that remains unchanged by success—the rugged individualist, the maverick ridge runner, the man who judges what he does strictly by his own standards.

Mapping new projects, public appearances and, of course, enjoying himself keep Brown busy. He's looking forward to a vacation so that he can enjoy his family and perhaps take a camping trip to the 200 acres he recently bought in the Sierra foothills near Fresno. But there are still plenty of personal appearances on his agenda and Brown, Pat and the kids are adjusting. His family is used to his comings and goings. In fact, recently when Brown went to get his one and only suit from the closet, his 7-year-old son Dana knew right away.

"Hey," he announced to Wade, 4, and Nancy, 1. "Dad's packing his movie suit."

As Brown folded the suit into his suitcase, Dana asked:

"Where you going this time, Dad?"

"Miami," Bruce said, "and I'll be back Tuesday . . . so we can do a little fishing." ☛