



Last light makes for a quick dash and splash

Below: the surfing at Mangamaunu is said by some to be better after the quake of 2017



The Take Away

Besides the extraordinary setting and perfect waves, it was the sheer physicality of the experience that I'll never forget. The stupor and fatigue of weeks of unrewarded exploring was obliterated in a heartbeat of unfettered release. I've been surfing for 20 years and it's the most memorable wave I've ever ridden.

The Build Up

Mangamaunu is a few miles north along State Hwy 1 from Kaikoura, a popular town on the east coast of New Zealand's South Island. Its extraordinary setting facing the snow-capped Kaikoura Ranges combined with long, fun waves make it popular with locals and visitors alike.

A right-hand point break, Mangas, as it's known, works best with a northeast-to-easterly swell direction and westerly winds. You can surf it on all tides, but you'll find the smallest crowds and best winds in the early mornings and late afternoons. Although not as powerful as some waves along this coast, it's not a spot for novice surfers.

You can sort wetsuits, surfboards and accommodation in Kaikoura. But for the full experience, Christchurch has lots of van rental companies – among them Classic Campers (classic-campers.com) for the vintage option – and thanks to New Zealand's relaxed attitude it's free for campervans to park and stay at the beach, as long as you clean up after yourself and respect the environment.



It had been a long drive. For weeks I'd trundled my vintage campervan over winding passes and down bumpy dirt tracks in search of surf. But as I followed the twisting coastal road, snow-flecked mountains looming to

my left and the iron-grey Pacific stretching endlessly to my right, Mangamaunu finally hove into view.

Arriving at this sweeping, boulder-strewn bay felt like dropping off the edge of the world. In the twilight, land and sea took on a monochrome hue that made it hard to distinguish cliff from beach from ocean. However, there was no mistaking the rhythmic pounding of perfect waves unfurling across the bay, nor the familiar nervous anticipation growing in my gut.

In the dying light my time was short, and as I paddled out, the lone surfer in the water caught a beautiful reeling wave to the beach. I was on my own but for the wildlife teeming all around me: a welcome intruder in an alien landscape, elemental and wonderful.

My wave came and I paddled hard, feeling that familiar drop as its energy took over, the salty spray in my mouth, the sting in my eyes. It curled over me and I screamed in exhilaration, my mind taking a snapshot I'll never forget – an extraordinary panorama framed by the wave's translucent lip encircling me. And then it hit, hurling me under, rolling me over and over until I found myself on my hands and knees on the shore, laughing maniacally in glee and relief.

By Duncan Madden



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