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Pioneer women surfers reflect on their struggle for recognition

Theme:
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 Pioneer women surfers reflect on their struggle for recognition

Co-authored by Robin Martin, Radio NZ

New Zealand women surfing pioneers gathered in Taranaki over the weekend to reminisce, share insights - and for some - to scratch that competitive itch again.

The Great Wahine Surf Reunion was held at the New Plymouth Surfriders Club as part of the Easter Masters Surfing Championship.

Jonette Mead - or Jonnie to her mates - remembers vividly her first encounter with surfing at Whangamata in 1963.



NZ women surfing icon Jonette Mead. Photo: RNZ

"It turned out to be a couple of American lads getting barrelled on our waves, I mean from that moment on that's what I wanted to do.

"So, an instant attraction to find out more about how you stood up and rode the ocean and so it was the following summer that my brother and I bought a board together and it's been a fabulous addiction ever since."

The early days were joyful.

"In the beginning of the 60s in surfing there weren't issues in the water with sexism we were all just filled with joy about discovering surfing.

"It was only when we got to the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s that some male - I have to say it - some male elitism began to emerge."

Jonette Mead's best-ever competition finish was second at the nationals in New Plymouth 59 years ago.

A celebrated surf administrator, she famously set up a women's only New Zealand tour after becoming frustrated at the lack of opportunities for female surfers.

Taranaki surf identity Daisy Day came to surfing via another route altogether.



Taranaki surfing identity Daisy Day. Photo: RNZ

"Loved the Beach Boys' music and wanted to know what this surfing was about and my father told me what surfing was - which was odd in itself because he was English.

"And when I was lucky enough to get down to the beach myself that was in 1975 or 1976 that's when I went 'oh my goodness I've got to do this, I've got to do this'."

The champion long boarder said she only encountered supportive male surfers but females were few and far between.

"Well I can remember there weren't many of us. We were scattered around, but not many in the 70s. I'd heard that there were a lot in the 60s and then in the 80s it became a lot more apparent there were females wanting to get out there and give it a go."

Nicky Murden got into surfing via her board shaping husband and won multiple long board national titles in the 90s.

She had a telling memory of surfing the Whangamata bar.

"So you had to prove yourself that you were actually worthy of being out there and I can remember a couple of time there were All Blacks surfing and one of them was Josh Kronfeld and he was on my inside and I thought he was going to go and I just like waited because it was like my wave and it was kinda like respect because he pulled off."



Mt Maunganui's Nicky Murden in action at the Easter Masters Surfing Championships in Taranaki. Photo: Supplied / Daisy Day

Now 58 she took to the waves over the weekend.

"It was my first contest in 19 years and I had an injury probably about three years ago, so it's taken me this long to get back in the water again, but I'll never give it up."

Tamizan-Nanji of the Aotearoa Women's Association organised a panel discussion as part of the reunion.

She was in awe of the sport's female icons.

"These women were I what I would call the original kiwi women surfers or the women that got into the sport well before any of us did and paved the pathway for us to be where we are today participating in competitions even just recreationally to be able to go and surf to have the confidence to go out. They paved the pathway for us."



Jonette Mead, Nicky Murden, Maxine Valentine and Gina Sampson take part in the Great Wahine Surf Reunion panel discussion with Tamizan Nanji. Photo: RNZ

A point echoed by Aucklander Tyler Rose who sat in on the panel discussion.

"Just looking back on archival stuff, in the news and surf mags, so many of their stories were untold.

"Like they were fighting for their places in competitions and fighting to have respect in the water. Like these guys paved the way for like surfing now."

Meanwhile, Jonette Mead said there was something special about women surfers.

"There something unique about women in surfing that was talked about in the room earlier and that was nurture, like you're literally aunties.



The Great Wahine Surf Reunion team photo at the New Plymouth Surfriders Club. Photo: RNZ

"Like when women are travelling around to surf they know there's a network of women waiting there to be supportive and encouraging and accommodating and help them out."

Male surfers had also come around.

"Oh yes definitely because the ability of women in the surf has got better, their ability to show up, to paddle out in anything and be present and do it is remarkable and so they've earned their respect and their place."

Gisborne's Saffi Vette will represent the New Zealand's current generation of women surfers at the Olympics later this year.

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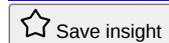
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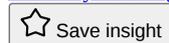
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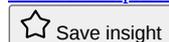


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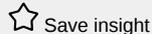


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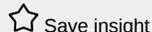


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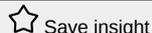
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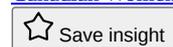
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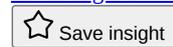
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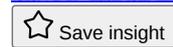
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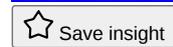
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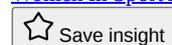
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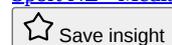


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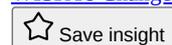


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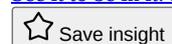


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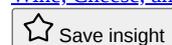


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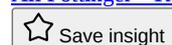


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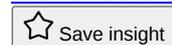


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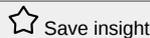
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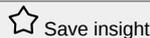
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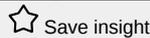
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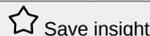
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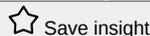
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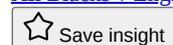
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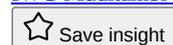
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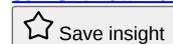
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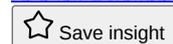
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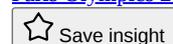
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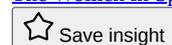
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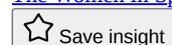
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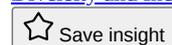
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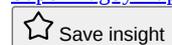
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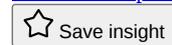
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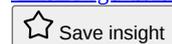
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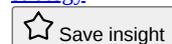
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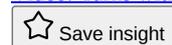
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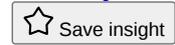
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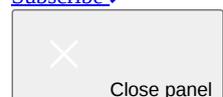
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