



HAWAIIAN, TOM DOSLAND, MAKING HIMSELF COMFORTABLE IN A BACKDOOR-  
ESQUE SOUTH OZ PIT.



# SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

SOUTH OZ ROLLS OUT THE FIN SHAPED WELCOME MAT FOR KOBY ABBERTON  
AND FRIENDS. WORDS AND PHOTOS BY SPENCER HORNBY

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO GO ON THIS TRIP I HAD NO IDEA WHAT I WAS GETTING MYSELF INTO. IT WAS A SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT HOME WITH MY OLD MAN, WATCHING THE FOOTY AND DRINKING GENEROUS AMOUNTS OF THAT "BEER" STUFF. ABOUT TEN MINUTES FROM HALF TIME, MY PHONE RINGS AND IT'S KOBY (ABBERTON) TELLING ME THAT HE WAS GOING TO HIT A WAVE IN SOUTH OZ AND IF I WANTED IN THEN I WAS TO PACK MY SHIT AND GET TO SYDNEY... NOW. THAT I DID; AND SOON ENOUGH KOBY, HAWAIIAN'S TOM DOSLAND AND SAGE HULS, AND YOURS TRULY WERE ON A PLANE AND ON OUR WAY TO THE RUGGED COASTLINE OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S EYRE PENINSULA.

A place where the waves pump, the sharks are big and hungry, and there's no tolerance for bullshit on any scale. Stepping off the plane and into that part of the country is like going back in time. I wasn't alive in the '70s, but from what I'm told this place has a similar ring to it. Originally we were only going to be there for a couple of days - Koby had spotted the perfect swell and wind conditions (on the charts) for a certain right-hander that he'd been keeping his eye on and decided to make a quick dash for it - but once we got the feel for the place we ended up staying for over a week.

After dumping some gear at our sardine tin accommodation we were straight back on the road, heading for the right-hander. For almost an hour we passed huge salt lakes that lined the arrow straight roads. As we got closer, before we'd even seen the ocean, we knew there was swell - we could hear it. When the ocean did come into view I was in the front seat fucking around with camera gear on my

lap when suddenly all the boys in the car just started amping and roaring - just psyching. Both Sage and Tom were jaw dropped by how big, raw and lonely this place was and when I looked up so was I. The funny thing was that we weren't even looking at any wave in particular it was just huge lines stacked as far as you could see and the darkest blue ocean I have ever laid eyes on.

With the stacked lined morphing into eight-foot-plus sets along every rock shelf on the coast we stared at the bay for the best part of ten seconds before everyone jumped out of the car and peeped over the cliff's edge only to see exactly what we had come there for. BANG! Six-foot-plus slabs just rolling perfectly onto the ledge and spitting wonders. Koby didn't really say too much at first. He kind of just stood there and smiled. He'd promised the boys waves and he'd delivered. Sage was going crazy, jumping up and down freaking out, kicking dirt and high on life. I don't think he'd anticipated this when he left Hawaii for Australia. Half an hour later the boys were all standing in overhead, perfect and otherwise empty waves.

TOM AGAIN, CHECKING HOW IT FEELS GOING LEFT.



THE CLIFF-TOP SURF CHECK IS A STAPLE 'ROUND THESE PARTS.

## SEAL

Later that day we hit the same right-hander for a second session on the last bit of good tide. To say I was scared out there swimming would be an understatement but it's also fair to say that there was nothing I could do about it; after all, Koby didn't bring me on this trip so I could enjoy myself spectating from the car park. Anyway, towards the end of the session I was hanging on the inside just in front of the big ledge drop off when I saw the shadow of an object much bigger than myself and knew straight away that it definitely wasn't a dolphin. It swooped under the boys on the peak and took a direct bee-line at me. Thinking it was a white, I quickly threw a farewell party for the lower half of my body and held my breath as it fanged for me at high speed. Then, at the last second I quickly threw my legs wide open in the hope it would go straight through them... and it did! By this stage I was totally freaking out to a point where I started yelling and cursing and Sage, Koby and Tom just started pissing themselves laughing because they had spotted it earlier and so knew the whole time that it was just a fluffy old seal. I sent myself in.

## COMPANY

On the fourth day of the trip we received the news that Koby's brother Jai and house-mate Ahu Taylor were soon to be joining us all the way from Maroubra. When they arrived it sparked new life into the general vibe. This was mostly thanks to Jai, who hadn't surfed in a year and a half and was showing signs of the grommet within. The night they arrived he turned to me and just said, "Fuck all the sharks, brah. I was watchin' a docco the other night where a polar bear had to get through all these killer whales and great whites and it just jumped in and fuckin' swam straight through em'... not even givin' a fuck about em! That's what you've gotta do Spence, when you swim out there to shoot pretend you're the polar bear." For a bit of a break I headed outside and joined Ahu, who was choofing on a ciggy and looking a little rattled. "What's up, mate?" I asked a little bit worried that something was wrong. "Man, Jai's been a handful!" he replied and we both started laughing at his situation. "Fuck, I was trying to sleep on the plane over and he's just walked up the aisle and givin' me a full blown smack in the head because he was so excited to surf!"

But the burst of energy was unreal, and, as if to prove Ahu's point, the next day the whole shack was woken early by Jai running around and pulling everyone out of bed and hassling like a kid on Christmas day. "Calm the fuck down, Jai!" Screamed Kobes in a tired, pissed off, 4 am manner and the two broke out into a light-hearted brotherly dispute which soon fizzled out. And even though it was cold, dark and quiet outside, within half an hour we were all crammed into the truck and on our way to another right-hander, this time in the opposite direction of our last wave, distancing ourselves from the world further and further by the mile.

The boys had checked this wave the previous day but were told by a couple of local lads that it would be better the next morning. They hadn't steered us wrong and the long drive and endless walk to check the surf paid off in spades as we were greeted with five-foot-plus sets pouring in and running off the reef perfectly. Surfing and swimming in these parts of the world is usually a pretty dicey task and tainted by the thought of sharks, however on this particular morning it was nothing but a pleasure. The water was a clear light blue, the sun was out, the boys were together in pumping waves and the only dorsal fins in sight were those of dolphins.

## BOYS WILL BE BUOYS

People say that money is the root of all evil, and this could easily have been the case for Tom, who early into our third day of the trip made the mistake of declaring bankruptcy to Koby, subsequently making him instantly susceptible to any cruel dares for money that may come his way.



KOBY DOING HIS BEST BARKING SEAL IMPERSONATION.

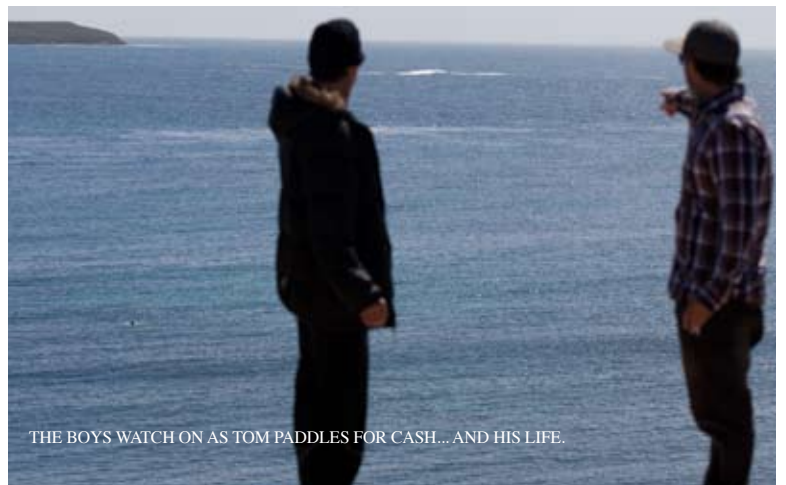
THE OTHER HAWAIIAN, SAGE HULS, PUTTING HIMSELF INTO A POSTCARD PIT AT BLACKS.



**“IT SWOOPED UNDER THE BOYS ON THE PEAK AND TOOK A DIRECT BEE-LINE AT ME. THINKING IT WAS A WHITE, I QUICKLY THREW A FAREWELL PARTY FOR THE LOWER HALF OF MY BODY AND HELD MY BREATH AS IT FANGED FOR ME AT HIGH SPEED.”**



KOBES DOING THE DESERT DASH BEFORE THE HEART-IN-THROAT CHANNEL PADDLE.



THE BOYS WATCH ON AS TOM PADDLES FOR CASH... AND HIS LIFE.

# SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT



THE HAWAIIANS HAVE A MOMENT, AS SAGE PULLS IN WHILE TOM SALUTES.

After all we were in the desert, he was broke, and we needed entertainment. So during our routine surf check on the cliff tops of Blackfella's (a wave which sits at the forefront of what is possibly the sharkiest bay that our country has to offer – the place absolutely oozes of white pointer and has the statistics and tombstones to back it up) the next day Koby laid down the first dare. Lighting a ciggie as he sidestepped out of our hire car, Koby was eyeing off the horizon and not saying anything. 'What the fuck is he thinking?' I pondered to myself as I looked him over suspiciously, when suddenly he started cackling, "Oi Tom, I'll give ya two hundred bucks if ya swim out to that fishing buoy!" he yelled, pointing out to a little bobbing object more than two hundred and fifty meters off shore. So close yet so far away.

By the time I had turned around to tell Tom not to go through with it, he was halfway down the cliff with tee shirt in hand and buoy in his sight. "I wonder if he even knows how dangerous this is?" I thought aloud whilst getting my camera out of the car. By the time I got back to the cliff top he was well into his swim and truly vulnerable to whatever the fuck wanted him. Fortunately luck was on his side and Tom was able to reach the buoy, turn around and head back to shore untouched and two hundred dollars richer. If I had the money to throw it around like tissues in chick-flick, I would have just about given it to him not to do it.

**'WHAT THE FUCK IS HE THINKING?' I PONDERED TO MYSELF AS I LOOKED HIM OVER SUSPICIOUSLY, WHEN SUDDENLY HE STARTED CACKLING, "OI TOM, I'LL GIVE YA TWO HUNDRED BUCKS IF YA SWIM OUT TO THAT FISHING BUOY!"**

## THE LOCALS

Spend more than five minutes with a true local 'round these parts of town and you will soon realise just how straight forward and genuine it can get. Whether it be an old lady serving you a pie at the corner bakery, an abalone diver at the pub or one of the boys in the car park, it's a no-bullshit approach to just about everything, and they're as tough as anchor ropes. Pulling up to the car park at Blackfella's after Tom's first dare, we were greeted by local ripper and good friend Josiah Schmucker and his new surf buddy Sam Ford. I'm not sure how long they were there for before we arrived but the lineup was empty and it was pumping, so I got the impression they wanted some company.

To surf, or have any kind of constant relationship with the ocean, in these parts of Australia you have to really want it and even though these two blokes might have been waiting for some company, they are both a hundred percent committed. I quickly congratulated Josiah on his recent second placing at the recent big wave junior event right near his house. The kid's got talent to burn but he recognises his surroundings. When I asked him about the area he's from and the sharks that roam the place he told me of his latest scare, "Just the other day Sam and I had to get out of the water because there was a 12 foot white heading our way. It's pretty scary to think that if our mates Mark and Jay hadn't spotted it and gotten in contact we could have been taken". I wonder how many other local surfers have a story that rings familiar to this one. As time went on it stopped surprising me to see people just hanging around in the car park while the waves were absolutely pumping, just waiting for someone to surf with.

## KOBY

Throughout the eight days we spent there driving frantically up and down the coast in search of the waves, there was a lot of talking in the car to get us through the long stretches. Stowed away in the 50cm square seating area that was designated to me in the boot, I couldn't help but



KEEN TO STAY ABOVE THE DEEP BLUE (AND WHATEVER IT CONTAINS), SAGE CHASES THE LIGHT AT THE RIGHT.



**SOUTHERN  
DISCOMFORT**

KOBY TAKES TIME OUT FROM THE BARREL TO TAKE IT TO THE LIP.



EVERYTHING YOU NEED AFTER A DAY OF SURFING IN SA – A BIG PLATE OF GRITS FOR YOUR GUTS, AND A PACK OF WINNIE BLUES FOR THE NERVES.



listen in on the conversations and stories that grew amongst the boys. In particular, Koby's entertaining yarns of women, Hollywood, waves, sponsorships, wipeouts at Jaws, party's with the various celebrities in numerous nightclubs around the world, brotherhood, court cases, who he loves, who he hates, magazines, airports, travel, the boys at home, growing up and learning to survive a fucking rough childhood, and somewhere in all of that making a bucket load of cash. These weren't exactly the types of stories I'd come to know and listen to at the Bateau Bay pub. But even with all the stories, the hype and the stardom that surrounds Koby these days he still has a somewhat humble and extremely honest way of being.

Like everybody, he loses his temper (it's only natural) from time to time but he'll always come good. I lost count of the amount of times he yelled at me for various fuckups on the trip whether it was a missed wave on my behalf, shithouse driving or unwashed dishes, but at the same time he was giving me advice and teaching me lessons to be learned in the process of letting me know.

His reputation for loving a good time is well founded (fuck he can party) but it's obvious from just a few days with him that his somewhat ruthless antics and rough way of living are accompanied with a strong sense of responsibility. Halfway through the trip we met a lovely family in Elliston (the small fishing town where we were staying) who offered us their rental house for a few nights right on the water. Koby sat down with the boys from the family and listened to their stories, answered their questions, posed with them for photos with them and invited them to stay for dinner.

## THE HAWAIIANS

This was my first time I'd hung out with Tom and Sage. They were awesome guys and like me they were totally blown away by the whole energy that South Australia has to offer – especially in the water. As Tom noted “The waves down here get just as big and pow-

erful as back home but it's cold and there's way more sharks.” Even so it wasn't long before they were slotting in to the waves on offer with the ease and control that I expected to see in Hawaiian surfers. Tom's a mellow and relaxed sort of bloke who doesn't seem to hype things up too often, but when he surfs it's hard, fierce and one hundred percent, which has subsequently earned him a solid reputation in waves of consequence like Pipe and Backdoor. I don't think I saw him hesitate once.

## THE BAKERY GIRL

But no matter how cool they are, when your travelling with a bunch of blokes through a desert for a few days things can get a little... well, stale. Salt, surf, shark stories, tempers and sun were playing with my head and I needed a fresh front. Pulling up at a set of shops in one of the towns I stepped into a bakery while the boys all sucked down a ciggie outside. While looking over the selection of pies a pretty young girl at the other end of the shop caught my eye. 'Ah, perfect.' I thought to myself as I shuffled my way towards her end of the counter. A simple conversation would be about as refreshing as a cold drink at that moment. “How are you?” I asked as she glanced up to me and smiled in a surprisingly interested manner. “Yeah good thanks, yourself?” she replied, but then, just as I was about to hit her with my next line I hear the fucking door bell jingle behind me and in walks Koby. Her eye's light up (as they always do) and she is immediately distracted by the presence of her new found customer. Koby approaches us and asks me which pie I want and by the time I came back with an answer he was locked in a conversation with the girl, sending me into a backfooted spiral. Looking at both of us, the poor girl had to then face the awful task of having to choose between a high profile, highly paid, big wave surfer with global status and an uncountable fan base... or a broke and unknown photographer who couldn't buy his own lunch. Decisions, decisions.

KOBY, SHOWING JUST WHY EVERYONE WAS KEEPING THEIR EYES ON HIM, AS HE WEAVES HIS WAY THROUGH ANOTHER 'WAVE OF THE DAY'.





## PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE

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There are a lot of things to admire about South Australia; and in particular the stretch of coast we were situated. When I look back on the trip just gone it strikes me how much the place really brings out your raw energy. Take for instance the blanket of uncertainty you feel when you hit the water. It's cold, it's sharky as all fuck, and it's a deep dark shade of blue, surrounded by cliff's that resemble skyscrapers and are backed up by kilometres of rough, lonely desert that's more suited to our good mate Ivan than your average human being. A lot of the waves we surfed and shot throughout our time there involved a paddle through either a dark channel or over big, fishy, shallow ledges that drop off into the deep world of the unknown, but what I love most about the place is its ability to make you feel somewhat insignificant in the big swing of things and totally vulnerable to mother nature, not only to the heavy waves and sharp reefs that are miles from medical help, but also to the dominant killing machines that are almost certainly lurking somewhere near you, ready to pluck you from their snack pantry at any given moment. We were lucky enough to not have a confirmed shark sighting when we were out there in the water but you get that eerie feeling that you're being observed from below. Once you've made the short dash across razor sharp rocks to ice cold water THAT'S IT... no more comfort zones. Forget your warm clothes and iPod back in the car, that's a million miles away now. Everything simply just goes out of the window and out of your control.

## BLACKS

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It was nearing the end of the trip and with the a bundle of high quality right-handers under the boys caps and the arrival of Jai (a naturally talented goofy footer) the group's focus soon shifted towards mixing it up a bit with a left. Given the approaching swell and wind direction, and the fact that this was our last day, there was only ever one wave we were going to hit - Blackfellas. Any surfer who knows their shit knows of this joint. The place has appeared in its share of magazines and shark attack stories on the news over the years. So as is always the case, for me at least, the hardest challenge was left until last. To surf or shoot Black's is not only a physical challenge, with the wave sitting on the other side of what is possibly the sharkiest, darkest and most evil channel known to man, it's also a total mind fuck to say the least. I geared up my camera and wetsuit and slowly made my way down the cliff to the rock ledge where I was to jump off. Shaking my head and trying to think of my happy place I leapt in just behind Koby and Josiah and started pushing water like my

life depended on it.

The water was so murky and dark that I couldn't see my flippers and within seconds of us all jumping in together the pack had split, leaving me all alone with my silent panic... when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, Jai screamed up along side of me in a chaotic yet comforting manner and started yelling "You're a fuckin' polar bear, Brah! Don't ya let any great white touch ya, just keep swimming brah you'll be sweet". Once I heard those words it all fell into place for me. I thought less about the sharks below me and more about the job in front of me.

Tom's first wave of the session turned out to be his last. But it was an absolute pisser - perhaps the wave of the day - as he bottom turned into a solid seven-foot slab and proceeded to get tubed off his head for the whole wave. Jai was so impressed by what he saw from the shoulder the he forgot to keep paddling, sitting in Tom's direct path of exit until the two collided with skin and bones. Jai's fin met Tom's leg and within five minutes of us being out there the lineup was rippled with Hawaiian blood. Concerned for his and everyone's personal safety, Koby sent Tom in immediately like he had faded someone at Ours. For the next few minutes my mind fought a battle between relief for myself and concern for Tom as he swam his bleeding piece of shark bait leg through the channel of death and scrambled up the rocks before a local gave him a hand and drove him to hospital to get 15 stitches.

Meanwhile back at Black's, as the late afternoon sun bellowed down upon us, the boys were having their way with the wave. Sage was sitting behind the peak and picking off some gems in the process. Local lads Josiah and Sam were obviously enjoying themselves, getting some sets and receiving kudos from Koby along the way. But as seemed to be the case with every session surfed on the trip Koby was the bloke that everyone was taking notice of. Whenever a set had reared its head the boys would scramble to sort out their positions and most of the time it was Koby that would end up with the best one. And this was even more evident in this final session at Black's, where he was showing the kind of form that has made him famous, with late grab-rail takeoffs into heavy down the line sections and carelessly drawn lines into slabs that would knock him senseless. By the end of it Koby had what he had come for and with the sun starting to get low (and the fish skimming the top of the water's surface) we made a group decision to all exit as pack, with safety in numbers proving to be the way to go round these parts. And as I got washed up over the ledge and into the knee-deep water I felt the biggest hit of relief I have ever experienced. Just to still have my legs attached to my body seemed like a blessing. We had our shots in the bag, the boys had had a good time and everyone was just plain stoked, you could see it in their faces. We had pushed the envelope far enough in the "Anxious State" and it was time to bail. 📷

USUALLY A DREAM SCENARIO, THE SOLO SESSION CAN BE MORE OF A NIGHTMARE AROUND HERE.

