

Surfing remains one  
of the archetypal  
Australian pursuits



*No tour of Australia is complete without sampling its famous beach life and, for the bold few, riding the waves. For an alternative surfing experience, Jeremy Hart tries outback surfing in Carnarvon, Western Australia*

Dave Proudlove has come to Red Bluff, a lumpy ochre headland jutting out into the Indian Ocean just shy of Australia's most northwesterly corner, to give up the rat race: by surfing one of the best waves in the world.

'Being in (the wave) is how I imagine being in heaven,' Dave grins, before reaching for the sky. 'You can stand up, and put your hands above your head.'

Dave and a community of less than a dozen other life escapees inhabit a strip of sandy Aussie foreshore not much wider than a couple of tennis courts. Here their world balances between thousands of miles of emptiness, Madagascar one way and the whole outback the other.

Bek and Jim Caldwell and their squadron of energetic kids are Dave's neighbours at Red Bluff, which ranks up there in the world of extreme waves with El Salvador and Fiji. Reid and Monique Durant, who run the Red Bluff Store (opening times depend on surf) are the other permanent inhabitants.

As we wait for the evening surf to pick up, I tell Monique that I was here 15 years ago, camping with dozens of surf travellers in the

caves that line the southern edge of the beach. This time I have driven the ten hours from Perth by Land Rover Discovery and am staying in Red Bluff's new upmarket eco-tents. 'The caves are out of bounds now. The roofs started to crumble,' she tells me. 'But the place still rocks. There are some great beach parties up here.'

It is 4pm. Surf time. Dave and the gang grab their boards and head for the action like gladiators marching manfully into the Colosseum.

Dave sees a wave with his name on it. It rears up behind him. His arms spin into a flailing motion and his board hooks itself into the power of the wave.

Now on his feet, Dave bends low as he skims along the face of the blue wall of water. As the wave threatens to close up, he flips his board round 180 degrees to try and get back in. Alas, the rollercoaster has closed on him and he has nowhere to go except towards the outback. The nose of his board dips into the surf and he is flicked forward, sprawling into the foam. He is not disappointed though. 'The good thing about living here is that there is always tomorrow,' grins Dave. 'And the day after ...'

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