



The Muddy Brothers of the River Severn

The Severn Bore, England

It's hard to imagine a surf experience further from the sunbaked beaches of California or Hawaii than riding waves on a cold, muddy river through the heart of the English countryside. It turns out, however, that the Severn Bore's army of devotees is as stoked as any other surf community on earth.

The bore is a single wave that forms just upriver from the city of Bristol in the southwest of England. Its creation owes to a chance convergence of tide and terrain. When the moon and sun align every few weeks, their combined gravitational pull creates a large tidal swing (known as a spring tide). As the incoming flow is forced between the Severn Estuary's narrow channel, the head of the tide forms into a wave. From there, it trundles upriver for about 21 miles (34 kilometers), breaking and reforming as it winds its way past pubs, churches, and grazing sheep.

The bore was first surfed by Colonel "Mad Jack" Churchill in the summer of 1955. A decorated military man, Churchill is best known for taking a sword and longbow into battle during the Second World War. Or he was, until the day he towed his homemade wooden surfboard behind his motorcycle to the banks of the Severn and paddled out into the history books. The wave continues to attract a similarly eccentric crew, who call themselves "The Muddy Brothers." They share a deep sense of camaraderie, born largely of the fact that, unlike in the ocean, the single wave must be shared by all. They ride shoulder to shoulder, shouting tips and encouragement to one another as they go. Following a wipeout, surfers rush back to their vehicles to race the wave upstream to the next access point. Any sort of tricks or maneuvers are generally eschewed, with a leg-achingly long ride being the ultimate goal for the seasoned bore surfer. The world record belongs to Steve King, a local railway engineer who managed to cover 7.5 miles (12 kilometers) during a single, unbroken ride that lasted over an hour. ~