

# THE FILTHY WEST

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Photos// Jason Wolcott

A behind the scenes account of the latest movie project by the BWS team.

It felt like we were in the middle of the great wildebeest migration, except we weren't in the Serengeti. We were in the great wide open expanses of Western Australia. The wildebeests were kangaroos, and the kangaroos were lethal.

It wasn't long before one left its mark on our psyche, jumping in front of the first of our three Apollo 4WD motor homes. The driver just slowed enough for the large hopping animal to miss the front bumper as the vehicle sped past. We were second in line and the massive kangaroo reversed course and crossed our path. Time became elastic, slowing down enough for me to see all the possible outcomes.

"Oh shit, we're going to hit it!" I heard myself say out loud in liquid slow motion. Before the scene cued back to real time, I swerved, and the fearless beast cleared the front of our car by centimetres. The animal then changed course and jumped hard against the side of our truck, tumbled to the bitumen, lifted itself and hopped off into the blackness as our driver managed to keep control of the vehicle.

Hours before, a German bartender in a small seaside pub had asked us where we were headed. When told of our intentions to head far north, she

responded with a bit of a smile and in a thick German accent said "It would take four awars in za daytime, but in za night, maybe nine because all za kangaroos".

She almost demanded we stay the night in the local caravan park for our safety, all the while telling gruesome tales of motorists' nocturnal meetings with two legged suicide machines. But with the chance of scoring remote surf on the new swell, we decided to push further north towards Kalbarri through the night.

A fourteen-day expedition such as the one we set out on is nothing short of an adventurer's dream come true. Australia is a vast continent that is sparsely inhabited, having a population roughly the same size as Southern California but with a landmass close to the size of the United States. It's not hard to simply get away from humanity and do your own thing in this amazing country. With a huge coastline open to swells from two oceans, as well as a healthy thermal sea breeze, Western Australia is a surfer's and kitesurfer's paradise. It would be the perfect place for the newly completed BWS international team to take to the road and see what the south western part of this immense country had to offer.



*Ryland Blakeney absolutely dominates the endless lefthanders that make West Oz one of the best surf kiting locations in the world*

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*Ben Wilson tearing into what all the guys consider to be one of the best set ups they have ever scored*



A gas stop was all it took for Josh, a confessed narcoleptic and 'sugar-holic', to spend way too much money on lollies, jamming bags of gummy worms and chocolate bars into every pocket of his parka. "I'm gonna need these when the waves get good li'l Tabitha" he says to Ben in an unmistakable mid-western drawl.

Josh Mulcoy, virtual royalty in the surfing world, has joined our crew for the second drive across Australia, missing our first due to family illness. Ryland Blakeney, Ben Wilson, and Ian Alldredge complete the crew. As always, we are filming a Ben Wilson Surf film, called 'The Filthy West'. Darren "Daz" McCagh and Olie Jacobson were also along to capture, via electronic sorcery, all the moving images for the upcoming film. We intended to experience life to its fullest and slay as many waves as we could in the time allotted

Day broke along the lonely wooded highway where we stopped for the night after pushing our luck as far as we dared. Somehow, the only casualties of the night were a possum, and an owl, which Ryland skillfully pried from between the cab and the overhead of his camper truck while the rest of us ate muesli. Unfortunately, hitting wild life is unavoidable while travelling such great distances through some of the most remote countryside any of us had ever seen.

Finally, parked atop a hill overlooking the break, we sit and watch it wondering if it is possible, with the wind direction blowing straight into the barrel and worse, onto the rock shelf. The swell was on the rise; it had doubled and then doubled again overnight.

Before tackling the surf grilled chicken and cheddar panini sandwiches were on the day's menu along with some Monster energy drink. Cooking up another amazing meal on the camp stove, Ben asks with the courtesy of a waiter, "Does anyone want seconds?"

I sat in utter shock that Ben was cooking us all lunch before pumping up his kite and attacking the heaviest slabbing right-hander we had ever seen. I knew that within minutes of finishing his chef's routine, Ben would be heading up to launch his kite and make his way out through 4.5m shore pound. It was one of those moments that bring to mind the term Jekyll and Hyde, the host one moment, a madman the next. The session that followed was almost Ben's last.



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As Ben and Dave came down wind towards the slab, the air was charged with anticipation. We all had chosen our vantage points in the amphitheatre-like cove to watch what seemed to be a gladiatorial battle with the sea. Ben had ridden a few waves successfully when he decided to put himself way too deep. He launched himself over the steps as the wave concentrated on blasting every last barnacle off the rock shelf. Without the aid of foot straps, Ben was separated from his board and dragged, thrown, and brutalized over the rock shelf and into the tiny bay. The kite was a complete loss but the session was saved by the heroics of Western Australian hell charger Dave, who luckily had a set of feet belts on his board. He proceeded to launch himself over the ledge time after time pulling up into ridiculous barrels. Fortunately, Ben was able to scramble to safety and pick up the pieces only to do it all again the next day as the swell rose. The second go-around was much more calculated with only a handful of waves being ridden in the light wind conditions.

Another spot we found was at the end of a paved road where we decided to let our tyre pressure down knowing from Ryland's past experience that this dirt and sand track would be a challenge. After one hour and two stops to dig out one of the 4x4's we got our first glimpse of a large aquamarine bay with a beach as white as fallen snow. A lonely boogie-boarder was just finishing packing up and said the waves were fun. He had a strange smile as I recall.

An hour later the crew paddled out to a reef that sat in the middle of the bay. A perfect right-hander peeled for 100 metres before going off into deep water. It did not take long to see what the boogie-boarder was smiling about.

I looked up from putting my water housing together and noticed three humans perched precariously on a tiny piece of dry reef, surfboards under arms. The





last surfer was paddling as fast as he could for the small piece of reef. This could only mean one thing. Shark!

Western Australia is known for many things: uncrowded landscapes, great waves, amazing wine, and big ass sharks.

It was the latter that had claimed our attention that day. Josh Mulcoy, a cold-water specialist, has had numerous encounters with the old man of the sea, *Carcharodon carcharias*, aka, great white shark and he was quick to point out that it was a rather large one at that. We noticed later that the carcass of a whale lay in a heap on the rocks on the northernmost edge of the bay. No doubt the smell of the rotting mammal was bringing the shark in for a closer look just like the sound of the ice cream truck will bring kids running in summer time. Thankfully no one ended up as an appetizer for the large visitor.

Moments after the adrenalin had worn off from the run-in with the shark, the horizon began to change texture signalling the arrival of the predicted 25 knot thermal sea breeze. We had also noticed a left, breaking in crystal clear water at the south end of the bay, which was far too tempting to pass up. Ben was the first to pump up and tack up wind to the perfect overhead left. The next two and a half hours proved to be the highlight of our trip. The waves were as good as it gets and not a soul in sight. Steady 20 to 25 knot side shore wind and an amazing backdrop of soaring cliffs and rocky outcrops made for a great photo session. It was so good in fact, that Ryland had to take the GoPro out and do some tracking just to show how clear the water and perfect the waves were. Ben, Ian, and Josh took turns riding in front of Ryland who, from his kite-powered perspective, captured every tail blow, floater, and huge hack the boys threw down. Knowing that we had a one hell of a drive out to the main road on the sketchy dirt, sand, and boulder-strewn road, it was hard to move on.

## NUMBERS

Cans of Monster energy drink consumed: 336

Bottles of XXXX Summer beer consumed: 689

Pounds of BrookFarm Muesli and trail mix devoured: 78 pounds

Kilometres driven: 4731 (2940.3356 miles)

Litres of fuel burned: 4326

Stuck in the sand while 4WD'ing: 32

Songs listened to on iPod: 4908

Kites destroyed: 3

Boards broken: 2

Near death experiences: 4

Shark sightings: 1 (big great white)

Pounds of steak barbecued: 73

Days on the road: 15

Days kited: 14

Cameras destroyed: 1

Nudist sighting: 1

Dead kangaroos on the road: 489

Average cost of a meal: \$25

Average wind speed: 19.65 knots

Average wave height: 6 foot

**Chances we would do it again if we could: 100%**



Josh was the standout in every surf session, here he scores a sick one on the best day of the trip



A rainy day at the furthest reach of our trip brought us to a small town with a laundrette which happened to have a large wooden table. The laundrette take over had begun. With twelve days of laundry to do and 100 gigabytes of memory cards to download, or not another image could be captured, we encamped. The table was turned into an office with five MacBook Pros, chargers, phones and hard drives. Eventually Monster energy drinks, beers, a sandwich making station, and a big bag of potato chips were added. As the day progressed the laundrette was further transformed into a movie set with cables, cameras, tripods, lighting and camera dollies all being crowded in to shoot interviews of the venerable road warriors. Add a few European backpackers,

attempting to get their washing done, undoubtedly confused by our utter domination of said laundrette and you have chaos.

One such nomad gave us a tip on a great camping spot with no chance of the rangers disturbing a night's sleep. An elderly lady sweeping the floor gave us curious looks. We found out she was the owner. The fact that we did \$100 worth of laundry and gave her some Monster and some cash insured a police free workday at our new office.

We headed south on the last leg of the trip and as luck would have it, there was a break in the swell. We hadn't had a chance on our first pass though



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this breathtaking country to do some wine tasting. Margaret River is known to have some of the best wineries in the world. After having a great last surf, we dug out collared shirts so as to not appear the hardened road warriors we had become and headed to Laurence Winery. It was a welcome break and a great experience tasting world class wines in an amazing setting. Sipping a merlot, Josh Mulcoy says with a smile "I could get used to this little Timmy" to no one in particular.

During our trip days were spent four-wheel driving down dirt tracks, some of which sent chills up my spine, in search of perfect waves. "We are supposed to drive this thing down that! You're kidding right?"

Knowing the sea breeze would turn our morning surfing playground into a kite version of a skate park was enough to push our driving skills to the max. We would surf all morning and as soon as the wind picked up, paddle in and pump up to experience the same lineup on a kite. The cold clear nights were the reward for a hard day's work. The Milky Way Galaxy spreads her arms outward in a broad stroke across the soot black, moonless sky. The Southern Cross is visible, as is Orion's Belt. It's like looking at a black plate with diamonds spread across it ... amazing! The night sky was as clear as I have seen in all my travels, making camping on the beach a surreal experience. As soon as day broke we were up to do it again. Western Australia is a rugged rural paradise and like the kangaroos on our first night, has left a lasting impression on all of us. I for one will be back. 

