



Timmy Turner: golden light in the land of the lefts.



How it used to be.



Aspects of a traditional way of life.



What now stands at the site of the above photo.  
Henry photo



It's lineups like this that stand at risk. Henry photo

# oxen and action

SAVING THE WAVES IN SOUTHERN CHILE BY WILL HENRY | PHOTOS BY JEREMY KORESKI

The sun rose over the mountains to our backs, blood red and silhouetting the pine trees along a distant ridge. We stared out at the South Pacific Ocean, the air chilly and misty, watching a newly arrived swell wrap around a headland and peel down a long sandbar. There was no one in the water, and we watched wave after wave peel down the point, the sun glinting off the falling lips. We were awestruck by the beauty. At home we would've been running for our boards, but the south winds were likely to keep the break glassy all day, and we were in no apparent hurry to hit the cold water.

Finally someone broke the silence.

"I'm out there," said Timmy, always the first guy in and the last one out.

Gradually we all donned our wetsuits, booties and hoods and joined him in the lineup. Trading waves all morning, watching some of the world's best surfers carve turns on the glassy walls, we all felt that the true spirit of surfing was with us that day. Plenty of waves for everyone, beauty all around us, and a picturesque fishing village as our only backdrop. Oxen periodically appeared on the beach to haul the fishing boats into the water; once they'd dragged the pangas into

the shallows, the ox drivers would detach their beasts from the boats, and the fishermen would warily watch the sea, timing the sets and waiting for their chance to clear the surf zone. When the lulls came, we'd hear them gun the engines, the boats would leap over the waves on the inside section, and the fishermen would raise a hand to us in salute before heading out into the deep waters of the Humboldt Current.

Our team was a group of pro surfers and surfer environmentalists on a mission to work together with the surfers and fishermen of Southern Chile. We were here to

shoot the beginning stages of *All Points South*, a new film by Save the Waves Coalition that aims to highlight Chile's surf and bring attention to the pulp industry that threatens the country's water quality. We were surfing with a purpose—not just the pure stoke of it—and knowing that seemed to make every ride that much sweeter.

Earlier in the week we'd met up with Ramon Navarro, one of Chile's first pro surfers, who comes from a family of fishermen and divers. On one of the small days, while we surfed a beachbreak near his hometown of Pichilemu, Ramon skipped the surf and

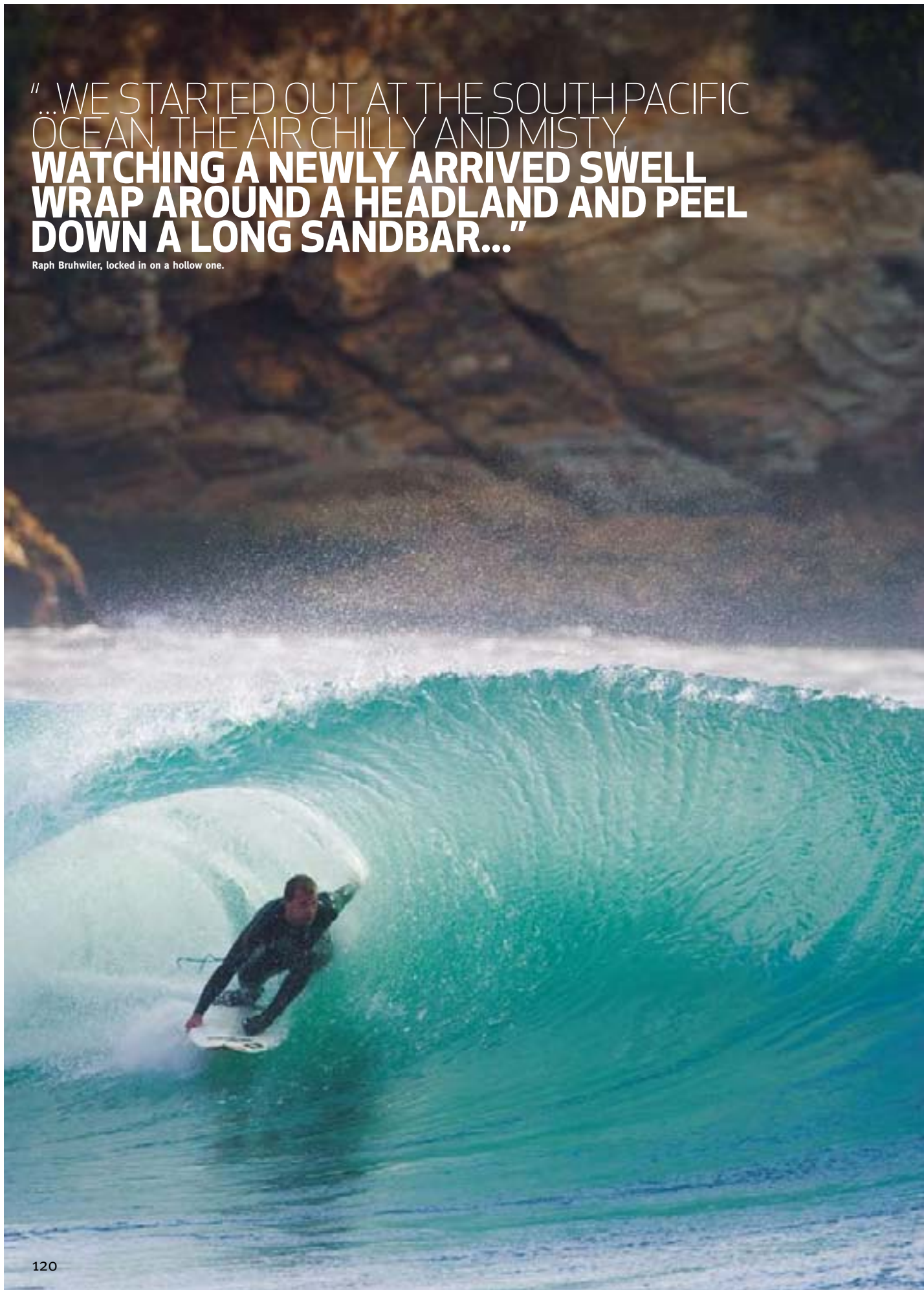
headed out on his father's panga, returning with a bounty of fresh fish and shellfish. That night we shared beers and fresh seafood at his family's home, being treated to some of Chile's greatest delicacies. The next day, when the swell came up, we surfed the beachbreak with Ramon, and later that night we visited him at his home in the hills above Punta de Lobos to talk about Chile's future. His words of wisdom were further inspiration for our journey.

As we headed farther south, we didn't find the surf we were expecting, but we did find some quality waves. The pointbreaks

in the region—famous for their long, mind-bending barrels—are dependent on an ever-fluctuating littoral sand flow that, as luck would have it, wasn't working in our favour this year. Nonetheless, even though we didn't get the longest barrels of our lives, we still surfed high-quality waves every day of the trip. We also met some interesting characters along the way—people who live in the villages that dot the coastline of Southern Chile and whose intertwined lives are dependent on the health and providence of the land and the sea. Here are some of their stories.

"...WE STARTED OUT AT THE SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN, THE AIR CHILLY AND MISTY, WATCHING A NEWLY ARRIVED SWELL WRAP AROUND A HEADLAND AND PEEL DOWN A LONG SANDBAR..."

Raph Bruhwiler, locked in on a hollow one.



Chilean spirit.



My name is Jose Luis Monterey Medina. I am an ox driver. I own four oxen, or *bu-eyes*, as we call them in Spanish. The oxen are my livelihood. Here in Chile's Region VIII, to the south of Santiago, oxen are an important part of daily life. Without them, we would have no food on our table. We need them to pull the boats into the water so that the fishermen may enter the sea, and when they return we pull them up the beach to safety from the high tide. The oxen also pull the plow through the fields that supply us with fresh vegetables. Other times my oxen are called upon for less important tasks, like dragging logs that have been felled by the forestry companies, or rescuing a tourist's car that has gotten stuck in the sand on the beach.

In the morning I rise to the smell of the sea and the dew-moistened earth, and all day I work outside, talking with the people of my village and performing a task that helps people succeed in their lives. I was born in the same town in which I still live, and my ancestry here goes back as far as my family can remember. My father was an ox driver, and when I was a young boy of 12, I began to accompany him in his daily work. He taught me how to use the *picana*,

the stick that we use to control the oxen, and I learned how to break young bulls and train them to respond to the stick. The *picana* is a pole of hard wood about two metres in length, with a flat metal end attached to one side and a nail to the other. Most of the time, with a well-trained ox, we only use the flat end; but if an ox is stubborn, we use the nail to remind them who's boss. The *picana* tells the oxen how to move, and once trained they can out-manoeuvre anything with an engine. They understand my words and the movement of the stick—watching it closely with their large eyes—and they almost always do as I say without me having to touch them. For that, they're treated as kings in the world of animals. We feed them almost as well as we feed ourselves.

I'm a happy person. I live a simple life, close to my family and friends, and perform a job important to the community. I've seen my oxen do what many machines cannot. They talk of some machines having 200 horsepower, but they fail to measure up to what two oxen can do in the sand. I'm not a rich man, but I earn enough to feed my wife and three children, and I'm thankful every day for the life I'm blessed with. Sometimes, on the television at night, I watch the telenovelas [essentially a version of a soap opera] about the rich people who live in the cities: their problems, their love affairs, their complicated lives and their lying ways. I find the shows amusing, but they also give me an odd sense of pleasure, because they teach me that the life I live is far more pleasant. I read the newspapers every day to learn about what is happening in our country and in the world. My father taught me that this is very important—to stay aware of politics and social issues, and to be ready to act if the democratic rights of our people are ever threatened. My father remembers the revolution well. I was very young and don't remember much, but at that time—when President Salvador Allende was executed and Augusto Pinochet took power—some of my relatives disappeared, and my father told me they were murdered because they had supported Allende.

When I was 16, my father took me to the patio outside our small adobe house and sat me down on the concrete bench under the grapevines. He was very serious.

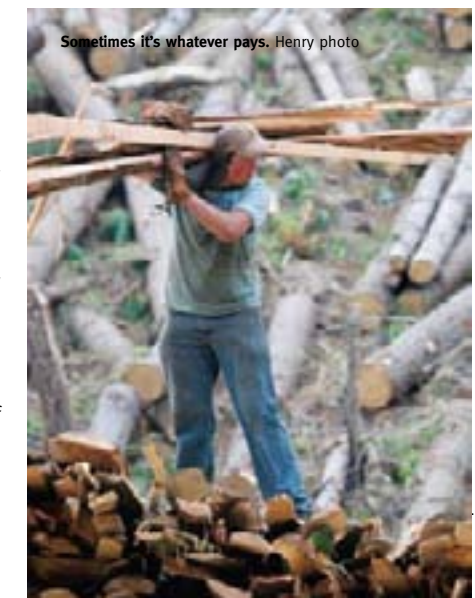
"Knowledge is power," he said. "Even though we are from an isolated village and are not worth much in the eyes of the wealthy men in Santiago, we must stay aware of what is happening in their world. We must not let them take away the life that is rightfully ours."

I still hear his words as clearly as the day he spoke them.

Changes are inevitable, I suppose. There are plans to build a paved highway through our village, and while some people are happy for it, I am not. I fear we will lose some of the peace and simplicity of our life. The government tells us it will bring more tourism

to our region. "Pavement is progress," they say. I am not so certain of this. Many people come here from Santiago during the summer months to enjoy the beaches and the stress-free environment of my village, and I think even they will be disappointed if the roads are paved. During the rest of the year, the only tourists who come here are surfers. They are friendly people, and the ones I've spoken to also want the simple life to remain. They seem to be wealthier than most of the people around here, but they don't act like the people on the telenovelas. They have a connection to the sea, much like the fishermen: a connection that drives them and seems to bring them great pleasure.

Every day I talk to my fishermen friends. They are worried about the changes that are happening in our country and in our world. But it's not the highway that worries them—it's the decline in their catches. If the fishermen lose their livelihood, and if the fish are no longer plentiful in the sea, then I too will suffer. Everyone will suffer. How will we feed our families? And what will our children do in the future? They will not be able to follow our way of life, and perhaps will be forced to go to work in the factories or live in the cities. It disgusts me to think that my children may someday become like the people I see on TV. I see what is happening: the big corporations have too much power, and they control the political machine. If the common people do not realize this, it may be too late to turn back this black tide that is creeping toward us.



Ramon Navarro, one of Chile's finest waveriders. Henry photo



Chilean local: this guy has seen a lot come and go.



Timmy Turner, out for another session.



Chile's real riches: points forever.



Brett Schwartz, setting it up on southern glass.



My name is Javier Juan Augustin Fernandez, and I am a fisherman and diver of Mapuche blood. I come from a long line of men who have made their living from the bounty of the sea. My bloodline precedes the Spanish conquest and the arrival of Columbus and Cortez, and our people are the original inhabitants of this beautiful land now known as Chile.

Much like a surfer, my life undulates according to the rhythms of the wind, swell, waves and tides. Our area of the world has always been famous for the delicacies that our ocean produces. Our shellfish is among the world's best—mussels, scallops, oysters and *locos*, our own version of abalone—and there has always been enough for the people of our village to eat and sell. We also catch fish that can fetch high prices on the international market, especially *corvina*, which is known elsewhere as Chilean sea bass. When I was young, there were so many *corvina* that we could fill our boat within a few hours and spend the rest of the day diving and relaxing with our families. Nowadays, sometimes many weeks go by without us catching a single fish, and we must work much harder to make a decent living.

There are many reasons why the fish have disappeared, and we, the traditional fishermen, are not to blame. For one, there are now many commercial gillnet boats, owned by rich men who do not fish themselves. They are taking more fish than the sea can provide; they are not driven by hunger for food, or to support their families, but merely by the desire for money. Their nets are so large that they capture many creatures, and the by-catch is killed before it can be released. That means that not only are the *corvina* caught, but their food sources as well, and in the end everything dies. My father taught me to respect the sea—and never to take more than she is willing to give—but the gillnetters do not respect these natural laws.

There is another threat to the sea that is even more fearful than the gillnetters. A pulp mill that has killed the river to the east of my village is now building a pipeline to the sea. This pipe will release toxins into the waters where we fish. We heard the news of the dead river in the newspaper two years ago. A company called Celco was pumping wastewater from its mill into the Rio Cruces; thousands of black-neck swans died, and now the river is completely devoid of life. After that, our former President, Ricardo Lagos, decided it would be better to dump the contaminants into the sea. He said that "the ocean has an infinite capacity to absorb industrial waste." Obviously he was not a fisherman, or he would never have said such a thing. Our life is hard enough with the gillnetters; if the pipeline is built, our sea will never recover.



Last year we joined our brothers and sisters from neighbouring regions to protest against the mills and their plans. Fishermen from far and wide drove to the Rio Itata, where a new Celco mill has been built. We were joined by farmers, ranchers, wine-growers and many other people. Thousands were there—people of the earth and people of the sea—yet the newspapers in Santiago did not even write a story about it.

One group of people who have joined us in our battle to protect the sea is the surfers. The first time I witnessed surfing in my village, I was captivated by it. As fishermen, we are taught to fear waves. A fisherman must read the sea to get his panga safely offshore, and when he returns he must do the same. Patience is essential, and we learn to understand that waves come in patterns and that by understanding these patterns we can keep our boats and our bodies safe. Surfers seem to understand these patterns too, and what is even more amazing is that they actually ride the waves. What we fear is their source of pleasure. It seems sometimes that they are almost drawing power from the waves that they ride, as though by harnessing the ocean's energy, they are tapping into its infinite power.

I have a hope that together we can protect the ocean from further harm. Perhaps we can all come together to put a stop to this madness. Why should we all lose what is precious to us because of the greed of a few wealthy men?

"...IT SEEMS SOMETIMES THAT THEY ARE ALMOST DRAWING POWER FROM THE WAVES THAT THEY RIDE, AS THOUGH **BY HARNESSING THE OCEAN'S ENERGY THEY ARE TAPPING INTO ITS INFINITE POWER.**"

Keith Malloy, demonstrating sustainable use of Chile's oceanic resources.



The boat name says it all.

My name is Alejandro Diego Catalan, and I am a forestry worker. I make my living by cutting down trees. I work for a company that pays me according to the number of board-feet I cut per day. Usually, I travel three or four hours by bus to get from where I live to the job site. There, I work nine-hour days for 11 days straight, after which I get a few days off to return to my family. I have this been doing this job for four years now, because there are no other jobs for me in my town. The fishing industry where I live is almost dead, and the tourism has also died because of the pulp mills that emit a foul, sulphuric smell into the air. We used to have tourists here every summer, but now they go to other places. And I don't blame them—I only live here because I can't afford to live anywhere else.

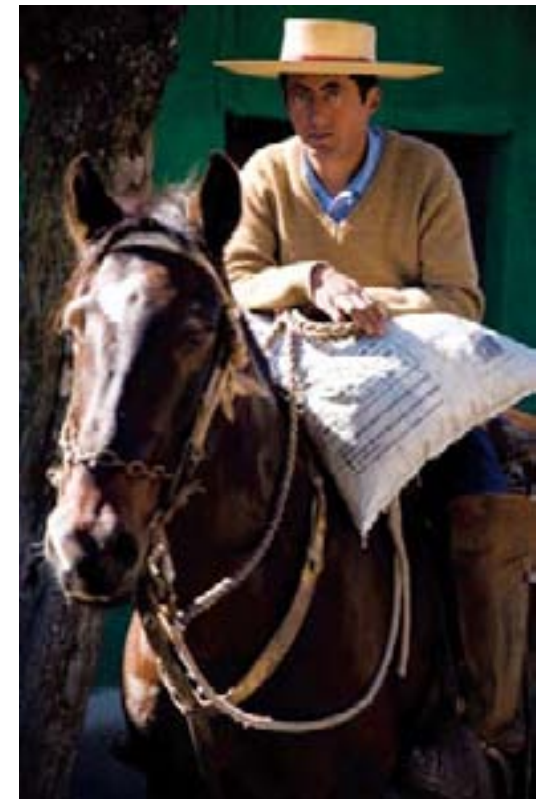
For the job I do, I'm paid about \$600 per month. I am also required to purchase and maintain my own chainsaw, which requires a significant portion of my salary to manage. By the time I pay for chainsaw maintenance, social security and other job-related expenses, I take home about \$300 per month. It's barely enough to keep my family alive. But I don't complain, because there are many other people who would love to have my job. At least I can put food on my family's table. The company feeds us well on the job site, although my friends tell me they do it because that way we cut more trees per day.

Usually I'm too tired to think about the harm I'm doing to the planet. People say the world is warming and that we need more trees, yet I cut them down all day long. But

then again, the trees are always replanted, so I guess it's not so bad. The trees we cut are all from tree farms. Back in the 1970s, President Pinochet gave land away and paid people vast sums of money to cut down the native forest. He wanted us to plant trees for the manufacturing of pulp, which is the main ingredient for making paper. The beautiful forests that my father remembers from his youth were clear-cut and replaced with monoculture farms of Monterey Pine and Blue Gum Eucalyptus.

Once, when I was young, my father took me to a reserve, a small patch of land where the native trees and plants had been left uncut. It was so beautiful that I could not believe our land had once looked that way. My father fell silent. He sat down on the ground and ran the soft soil through his fingers, then stared up at the towering hazelnut trees above us. In the glinting sun, I could see a teardrop in his eye. He brushed the tear away and stood up. That day he told me the names of the plants and their many medicinal uses, and spoke of the creatures that once inhabited the vast forest but have now all but disappeared. We came home that day with pockets full of hazelnuts, but lumps in our throats.

Sometimes when I'm home with my family, enjoying the few days I have with my wife and children, I dream about a better world. I wonder if there is a way to go back to where we started, and to make the right choices for the future instead of the wrong ones. I know it's not possible, but it's a dream I have. Maybe someday we can bring back what we've destroyed.



Chilean culture: stepping back in time.



Local groms, unloading for another day at their home break.



It's not all lefts.

I've learned a great deal during my 15-year relationship with Chile's surf and people, and the preceding three stories illustrate what many people in rural Chile must do to survive. At times I envy the simplicity of their lives, especially when I return home to the maddening pace of life in California, haunted by ringing cellphones, traffic, television and the constant bombardment of advertising selling shwag that we think we want but no one really needs. I wish I could somehow return to a simpler life—one more connected to the earth, and one that would allow me more time in the water. But when I see the hardships that many Chileans must endure, I realize that what I'm witnessing are the same changes that occurred in my own country decades ago. Visiting Southern Chile is like turning back the clock to witness a time in our not-so-distant past when people grew their own food and rode on horseback to the nearest village for supplies. It's a way of life that seems idyllic, until you see the writing on the wall: the Chilean way of life is being threatened by the same forces that are changing the shape of the entire globe.

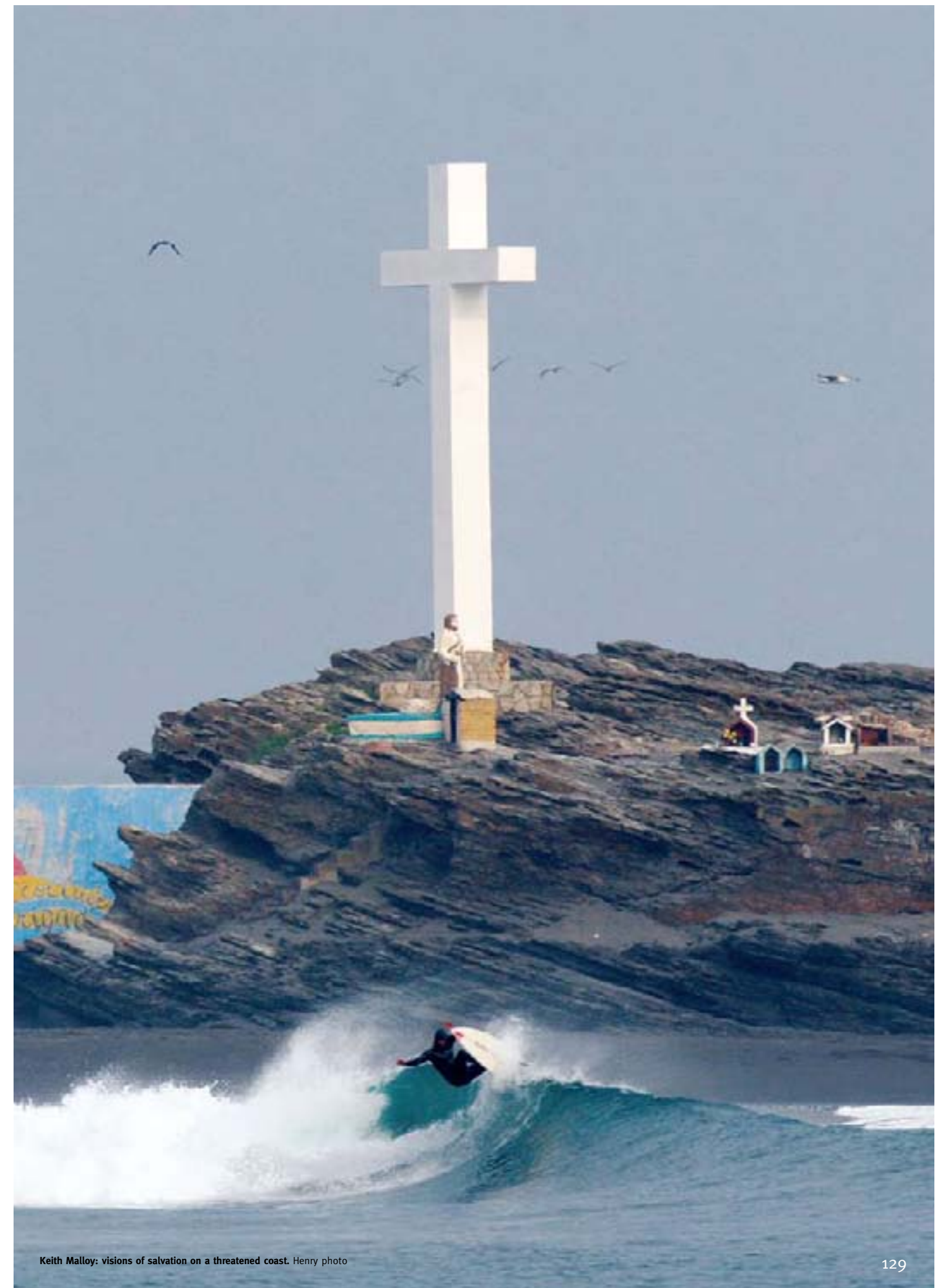
Currently, Chile has the reputation of being the healthiest economy in South America, but the reality is a bit different than what we read in the papers; large corporations are taking advantage of Chile's resources, raving its landscape and exploiting its workers. I've traveled the world over, and I've seen the same scenario play out again and again; where there's money to be made, corporations smell it like a shark senses blood in the water, and the politicians roll over like well-trained dogs. In the end, the rest of us lose something precious.

In 2001 I formed Save the Waves Coalition, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the world's surf spots. Chile has become one of our top priorities—because so many world-class waves are being threatened by water pollution, and also because my own connection to the country and its people runs so deep. On this trip I traveled with surfers Raph Bruhwiler, Keith Malloy, Timmy Turner, James Pribram and Brett Schwartz. Together we began a collaboration with filmmaker Vince Deur and environmentalist Joshua Barry in an effort to educate the world about what we'll all lose if Chile continues on its current path.

I believe strongly that all people who appreciate the natural world are joined by a common bond that knows no cultural boundaries. Save the Waves is based in the U.S., but it's run by people from all over the world. One of our biggest challenges is not to look like yet another American organization trying to tell people what to do with their own country's resources. Chileans are particularly sensitive to this, as they've had a history of rich Americans coming to their country and trying to influence domestic policy. But the situation with the pulp industry in Chile is indicative of many problems worldwide; for example, Celco's new mill in Nueva Aldea, which reportedly makes \$1 million of profit per day, is ruining prospects for most of the other business owners and industries around it. The pollution alone is threatening wineries, fishing and tourism—not to mention public health—yet the company manages to put a positive spin on everything it does. The propaganda spitting forth from Celco's publicity department makes them sound like environmental saints. They even sell carbon credits for the trees they plant, which means that well-meaning people with a concern for sustainable business practices are being duped, paying Celco to continue its destruction of the environmental. Pulp prices are higher than they've ever been, but Celco's workers barely earn a living wage.

Fighting Celco, though, is like trying to stop a charging bull with a butter knife. Owned by the Angelini Group, a Fortune 500 company that controls 49 per cent of Chile's fuel business, Celco's political might is formidable enough to ensure that it'll always get what it wants from Chile's government, and that those who stand in its way will be squashed like bugs.

The message I want to impart to the people of Chile is that we're all in this together. We've made many mistakes here in North America that Chileans should look at and learn from. We're trying to help the common citizens of Chile before they lose something that can never be replaced. There are solutions to the pulp industry dilemma that, in the long run, would be an economic boon for Chile. Perhaps the industry will have to sacrifice some of its huge profits, but if it will help the economy of Chile as a whole, it must be done. When you see the impacts that pulp manufacturing is having on air and water quality—as well as the fishing, farming and tourism industries—you realize quickly that Chile is sitting on a time bomb that could drag the country into desperate poverty. All I can do is use gentle persuasion to try to bring the truth to light, and hope that in the end Chileans make the right choices for their own future. The ox driver, the fisherman, the forestry worker—they're real people, and there are hundreds of thousands more like them who stand to lose everything that is dear to them. And for what? So a few wealthy men can become even richer.



Keith Malloy: visions of salvation on a threatened coast. Henry photo