

Scuzz.

Tracks Surfer of the Year



CHRIS SCURRAH, DIY TSUNAMI CHARITY // NORTH SUMATRA, 2005

IT'S PROBABLY A LITTLE UNFAIR TO SINGLE OUT ONE GUY FROM THE HUNDREDS WHO THREW THEMSELVES INTO THE POST-TSUNAMI AID EFFORT, BUT AUSSIE SURF CHARTER SKIPPER CHRIS SCURRAH WENT ABOVE AND BEYOND.



Man of the Year? You could do a lot worse than Chris "Scuzz" Scurrah, captain of the good ship *Asia* and partner in benevolence with Christina Fowler, a shoo-in for Woman of the Year. Precious calls? Maybe, but I don't know many others who would give all they have out of sheer human decency.

First on the scene post-tsunami in the west coast Sumatran islands, Scuzz's reports on the situation were critical in the co-ordination of mainstream aid outfits and efficient allocation of relief supplies. All the while he continued running around the islands like a blue-arsed fly, dropping off helicopter fuel for seismologists, delivering endless supplies to endless islands, and helping out Surf Aid in numerous ways.

Meanwhile, his American partner, Christina was back at command control, her beloved Batang Arau Hotel in Padang. Like a golden orb spider in her web, Christina was the centre of activity and all arms, organising a dozen things at once whilst staying cool and even charming her guests. There were three or four aid outfits' worth of people running back and forth constantly, tallying and assessing and arguing and

allocating and chartering and phoning and emailing. There were reporters, photographers, politicians, doctors. It was chaos, but Christina was in control, ironically in far rougher conditions than Chris usually encounters on his outer island cruises with his Sumatran Surfaris charter business.

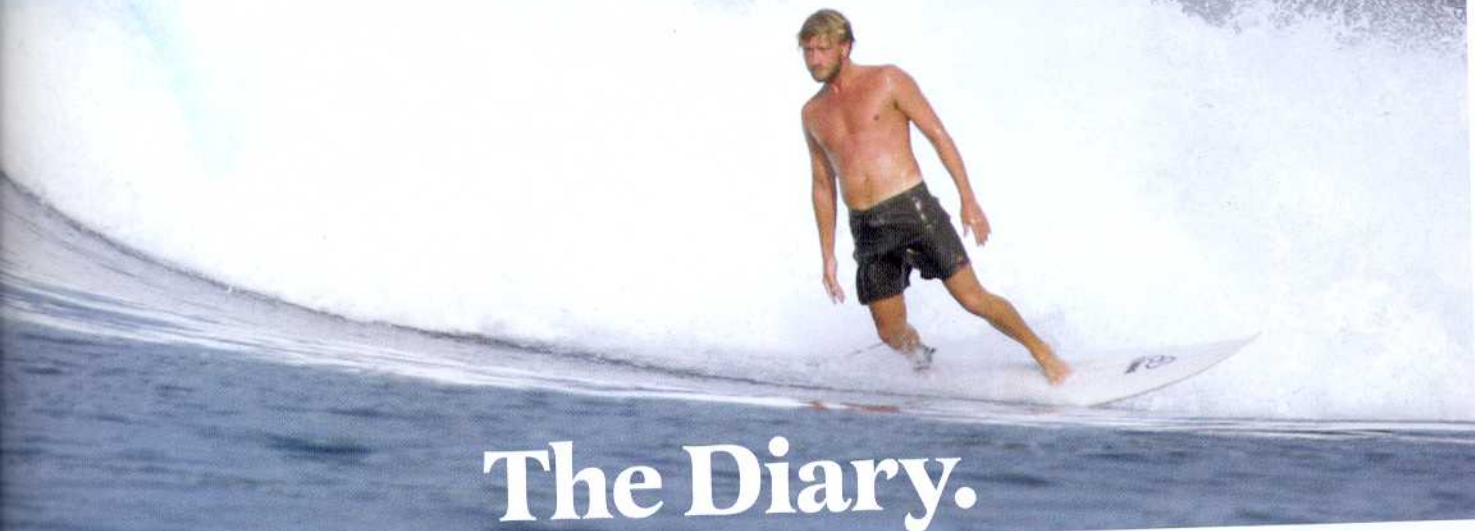
The clincher of course is that these two basically funded everything they did themselves, spending in the vicinity of 60-grand-plus. They figured they still had more than enough, and were merely trying to give thanks for what they'd received during their time in Sumatra. It's a fine way to think, and their thoughts reverberated around the world.

The following is Chris Scurrah's account of what's been happening in his life, almost a year post-tsunami.

BY DAVE SPARKES



AND WITH THE CRISIS
MELLOWING, SCUZZ HAS
EVEN FOUND TIME FOR A
SLY SURF OR TWO.



The Diary.



POST-TSUNAMI, POST-QUAKE, SCUZZ REPORTS FROM THE FRONT // OCTOBER, 2005

After the initial full-time aid work, we started to get back to surf charters in April. Our first charter after the March quake and the Californian guys on board were great in dealing with a boat full of supplies, climbing over all sorts of things to get to their beds. The main ask from the locals of western Nias and the outlying islands is water. These islands had lifted, and the bases of their wells were high and dry. They had daily quakes and the locals were terrified already, without having to climb down a deep sketchy hole and dig it deeper.

On top of this the amount of aid dropped on the mainland of Nias had caused rising prices; costs of transportation and ferries out to the Hinako Islands went up astronomically. The Chinese businessmen who used to buy the copra from the locals had run away or in some cases died, crushed under their bigger, more expensive concrete two-storey homes. Because of this most trade had come to a standstill.

Hinako Island was affected more by the March quake than

the tsunami, but it was also attended to more quickly as aid groups were already in place. That left us room to go surfing. The most exciting part for me was a second chance to find waves.

Overall, the waves are not as good. Some are better, some are unchanged, many are shorter, many are worse, a couple of gems are gone, a couple have been created. The publicity surrounding the bay at Nias and the famous Sorake Beach righthander is that it's better, and it is, but the small Kiddie's Corner wave that ran off so beautifully at high tide along the shore is no more.

I had one group of older guys from Rincon and they pulled out of their annual 21-nighter in May, stating that they didn't want to feel guilty having fun. They also loved Bawa and were devastated to hear that it was not the same.

Back to charters and all ran well: some groups brought over supplies and one group of Santa Cruz fellas raised \$8000, which all went north. Over time we had realised it was no good to just give handouts; that wasn't getting the people back

on their feet, it was teaching them to ask for freebies. Along with the help of Woodleigh School in Victoria and the Clean Ocean Foundation we started a veggie garden on Bawa. We leased land for three years, and employed any local who wanted work to clear the land, build a pig-proof fence, and clean out the soil. Kids and grannies work together, and even get paid daily. The fact they get a wage to go home with makes them and the family proud. You wouldn't believe all the little things you have to overcome. The latest has been crabs coming out at night and eating the vegies, so we have been burying buckets baited with fish guts. The crabs drop down to eat the fish and can't get out, hence saving the vegies and giving the locals some crab meat protein to go with their vegies and fruit!

A couple of months ago a Christian couple, Jo and Richard, came through and were so impressed with the garden that they stopped on Bawa to help out. Channa and Ruby of leap.org have taken this model and are starting a veggie garden on the island of Hinako.

Others I must mention who have been a huge help have been Mara Wolford, Noel at Tools for Tsunami, Matt George, Tony Litwak and Dave Lupo of SRO, who became fairy godfathers to Padang. They've also been given diplomatic passports by the President of Indonesia, and created an evacuation plan for Padang. They recently left to help with the clean-up of New Orleans. [Author's note: Matt is now in Pakistan helping with the earthquake aftermath.]

My sister, Alyssa, who just passed her medical exam, recently came back over with funds raised at Sydney Uni to do a medical check-up run out to Siberut (Mentawai).

And of course Christina, who has been the backbone; from the very start it was her good self finding the first ferry that made it to Aceh mainland and Calang, organising all the aid, donating our hotel and all its communication as a base to many different aid groups. Also pulling together all the charters while I was at sea and dealing with the ongoing pressures of getting supplies through the Indo bureaucracy. Champion!

On a last note, the raised dead reefs have started to break down. There is now rough sandy coral on the reef, and in a couple of places mangroves are sprouting. There's also a coconut or two we've put on the sand, to hopefully transform into more one-palm points in coming years. Perhaps over time this will create beautiful sandy beaches, just like the point at Macaronis was years ago. These will lead to more coconut palms and eventually hardwoods, which will then over time sink again before that sand gets washed away, those hardwoods rot and die, the palms fall down and the area gets ready to rumble and lift – as it will in the near future in the Mentawai. From what I have learned from the outcome of the northern lift, a couple of my favourite waves in the Mentawai will be gone, but it will be interesting to yet again check it all out. It's an amazingly alive time and place to be living in!

BY CHRIS SCURRAH

