



Cocaine + Surfing: A Sordid History of Surfing's Greatest Love Affair

Chas Smith , Matt Warshaw (Introduction)

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Date : Published June 12th 2018 by Rare Bird Books, A Vireo Book

ISBN :

Author : Chas Smith , Matt Warshaw (Introduction)

Format : Kindle Edition

Genre : Nonfiction, Travel

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From Reader Review Cocaine + Surfing: A Sordid History of Surfing's Greatest Love Affair for online ebook

Keith Grace says

To truly appreciate this book, one must get to know Chas Smith through other venues including his prior book about the underbelly of the North Shore as well as the brilliant podcast he does with David Lee Scales on Surf Splendor. The surf industry will dismiss this book. Some in surf media, who are complicit with the Surf apparel industry will also dismiss this book (just look at the baseless review of a Stab Magazine contributor).

And these are reasons precisely why this book should be read... not borrowed, but purchased and read. The underbelly needs more exposing. Keep 'em coming Mr. Smith.

Lori says

This is not a book about cocaine and surfing, it's a book about Chas Smith's struggle with his identity as a surf journalist.

On the surface, this narrative is an exercise in confirmation bias. Smith begins with the an idea that cocaine and surfing have been intrinsically intertwined since time immemorial and then he supports his conclusion with observational evidence and cherry picked facts.

However, the cocaine and surfing love story is a way for the author to come to terms with participation in a vocation he adores but has trouble valuing.

But even though the cocaine story turns out to be a red herring, I still fucking loved this book. With his signature snarkiness, the author does provide a candid look at drug use in the surfing industry. Some of it scathing, most of it ridiculous.

Many in the surf community (and the reading community it seems!) are annoyed by Smith, but I respect his honesty, appreciate his exposure of the absurd and definitely share his loathing of the disingenuous.

I will be reading more by this author.

Rory Parker says

The description of this book makes it seems as though the author is offering an unvarnished view into the seedy cocaine subculture of surfing. He does not.

Rather, the author employs mental gymnastics to connect the discredited South America to Polynesia origin of the Hawaiian people to a longstanding, albeit imaginary, relationship between the coca leaf and riding waves.

He tells a vague story about seeing a pair of unnamed professional surfers use cocaine one time. He asks people for cocaine at surf industry parties and is unable to find any. He speaks to Michael Tomson, a man with a well documented cocaine addiction, without revealing any information that isn't already public knowledge.

The author spends the rest of the time rehashing apocryphal tales, summarizing things that other people have written, complaining about the surf industry, mentioning the clothes he wears, and navel-gazing about his career as a surf journalist.

If you're looking for surf industry dirt, or shocking insight, you won't find it here. Professional surfers do drugs sometimes. If you've read that last sentence you've ingested the sum total of information on offer.

If you're a fan of self indulgent rambling and unsupported claims you might like this book. I did not.

Jo-Ann Duff (Duffy The Writer) says

I've not always been drawn to books about surfing and surfing culture, it's something that has crept up on me slowly since moving to Australia and holidaying in my happy place Waikiki. I've read the excellent Barbarian Days memoir whilst sat right on Waikiki beach, laughed at holidaymakers wobbling on body boards and watched competitions full of beautiful surfers wearing Roxy, Quiksilver and Billabong. I've taken numerous photos of the legendary Duke Kahanamoku (godfather of modern surfing) statue which sits proudly on Waikiki Beach. I watched in awe when Mick Fanning punched a shark in the face and I've bought Chia Pod pudding because Kelly Slater eats it and says it's good. That's the extent of my knowledge of surfing culture. Cocaine and Surfing schooled me in a love affair I didn't know existed.

Chas Smith starts off brutally honest in Cocaine and Surfing. There's no gentle warm up, Smith gets right to the business at hand. His hatred of the phoney culture, most of the surfers, and the big brands who both brought surfing into the mainstream, yet sold out on its behalf at the same time is obvious. One of the first things I picked up was that Smith doesn't seem to have many friends in the surfing world. Primarily due to his lack of filter, tact and open displeasure of the soulless surfing marketing machine, but he does acknowledge that he can be a complete dick at times. It's Smith's self-awareness of his failings which kept me engaged instead of hurling the book across the room.

Smith seems to resent his surfing journo career which has been his bread and butter outside of the exciting world of being a war correspondent. It's also clear that in tandem with writing Cocaine and Surfing, he's wrestling with his own self-doubt, career choices and tossed in a bit of mid-life reflection. There is a lot of Chas Smith in this book.

"[Chas] calls it like he sees it and in surfing that's not usually the case" - William Finnegan, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Barbarian Days

Chas Smith is an excellent journalist and an acerbic writer which is an interesting and entertaining mix. Smith refers to most of the pro surfers in his book by the name of their sponsor, not their name, and some of the take-downs are brutal and hilarious. I particularly enjoyed his open love for Kelly Slater. It was refreshing after so many pages of sledging to read that Smith has a heart, and a large part of it belongs to the universally beautiful and talented pro surfer.

Alongside personal interactions with various surfers, media, marketing dudes and surfing photographers, Smith delivers a thought-provoking expose on the relationship between cocaine and surfing culture. Starting 3000 years ago in Peru with the origins of the white powder, to the 70's when cocaine was Florida's biggest import. Smith then delves into today where cocaine seems to be as accessible as a beer. Why did these two worlds collide and why is there this strange and powerful love affair?

A particularly poignant story is that of the tragic early death of Andy Irons in 2010. A hugely successful surfer, known for his partying and 'going all in'. Irons died alone in a Texas airport hotel room and his wife was pregnant with their first child. The press and family listed his death as a heart attack, yet the rumour of drug use being a contributing factor was talked about in heavy whispers.

Who Should Read Surfing and Cocaine?

You don't need to be surfing mad to find Cocaine and Surfing interesting, this book is many things. A self-deprecating memoir of a surfing journo who maybe hoped for more. A book stuffed full of outrageous anecdotes. A serious journalistic investigation into cocaine use in surfing culture, and an expose of a world which is televised and promoted to show bronzed, healthy and squeaky clean sportsmen, but is actually a little grubby in places if you care to dive a little deeper.
