

The Olo Board

In the Hawaiian tradition dating back to long before western contact, the Olo board was reserved exclusively for Hawaiian royalty and chiefs or revered warriors of the very highest rank. Making a new Olo was attended by great ceremony and ritual presided over by kahunas, the Hawaiian shamans, with chants and sacrifices of fish and pigs—testament to the important role surfing played in ancient Hawaiian culture. At 20-plus feet long, six inches thick and weighing upwards of 200 pounds, the original Olos must have demanded great physical strength and dexterity to ride. But ridden they were, sometimes in contests in which huge wagers—of land, livestock and even wives—rode on the outcome.

When missionaries arrived in the early 1800s, however, both surfing and gambling were heavily suppressed. In fact, the art of surfing (and surfboard making) almost died out before its revival in Waikiki during the early years of the 20th century. The Olo board has held a fascination for surfboard builders ever since. (Content courtesy of the Honolulu Surfing Museum)