

On August 17th, 2021, big wave surfers Grant “Twiggy” Baker and Ian Walsh ventured to the north-western corner of South Africa in search of the worlds next XXL wave: The Peak.

For generations, Mavericks (California), Nazaré (Portugal), Waimea (Oahu) and Jaws (Maui) have been the world’s premier big wave breaks. However, what Twiggy and Ian discovered might be the first new addition to this daunting list in decades.

Both Twiggy and Ian have dedicated much of their lives to the pursuit of big wave rides all around the globe, but neither have ventured anywhere quite as remote or isolated as this stretch of coastline in the South African Desert. “I’ve traveled all over the world” Twiggy says, “But this coast that we’re going to is almost the final frontier of everything.”

Grant “Twiggy” Baker is a three-time big wave surfing champion who grew up on the beaches of Durban, South Africa. A jack-of-all-trades waterman, Twig is just as likely found riding 60-foot monster waves as he is longboarding one-footers, spearfishing or body surfing. He has spent much of his career chasing megalodon swells all around the globe and has become one of the most experienced big wave surfers of his generation.



Grant "Twiggy" Baker checking out some waves as he drives to basecamp. | HBO photo.

Few people in the world have as much open water experience as Twiggy, but Ian Walsh, is surely one of them. Ian has aimed to spend every free minute of daylight in the ocean since his upbringing on Maui. He began riding XXL waves when he was only a teenager, and his longevity and experience in the sport has opened all sorts of opportunities for him to explore the edges of the earth in all sorts of capacities. Beyond surfing, Ian has embarked on several extreme adventures including summiting and snowboarding down Denali and sailing across the Atlantic Ocean on a racing yacht. Like Twiggy, Ian has made comfortable a life lived on the edge.



Ian Walsh sitting in the lineup waiting for a set. | HBO photo.

The nervous excitement is palpable as Twiggy and Ian paddle out for their first surf of the mission. A lot had to be dealt with before anything like that happened, however. Unsurprisingly, “there’s a process to this sort of thing.” With the looming goal of finding new, rideable big waves, Grant and Ian began studying the coastline of South Africa by map and GPS, looking for the geological signifiers of a potential big wave location. They were looking for numerous, specific factors to coalesce for big waves to appear. Primarily, the bathymetry of the ocean floor needs to quickly go from very deep to shallow as it approaches the coast. This allows for the swell energy to remain at or near its maximum potential up until the waves begin to break. The layout of the coast is also important for maintaining the shape of the wave as it breaks. The channel must be deep enough to handle huge swell without causing close outs, waves that break all at once, instead of peeling laterally down the wave. After a careful surveying of the coast, Twiggy and Ian found a spot that seemed to check all the boxes for a big wave break just over 500 miles north of Cape Town and, just like that, their plan was set in motion.

After months of planning, ironing out logistics, tracking storms and waiting for the right time to strike, Ian and Twig pulled the trigger in August 2021. They met up in Cape Town and sent the fourteen hour drive up the coast with enough gear, fuel and rations to last them a month of camping on the desolate coastline. Once in the general area of The Peak, they strategically chose a basecamp where strike missions to the north and south of camp would be feasible. The goal of the trip was to find new waves to surf and potentially uncover that new big wave spot. Everywhere they looked there were waves - the potential for good surf was everywhere. Ian described it as, "having the whole coast of California with nobody around," so choosing the right spot took some careful consideration. Once camp was set up and the whole team was settled in, it was time to go over logistics and safety protocols with the team of filmers and aids.



Ian scoring double OH+. | HBO photo.

Throughout their time on this trip, Twiggy and Ian found some incredible waves and did some amazing surfing. They discovered new waves every morning before breakfast, and it really did seem like everywhere they looked they found quality surf spots. Apart from one bad storm that flooded camp, the team had favorable conditions most of the trip. The

only thing more they could have asked for was a bit more swell. But that's the nature of the game, isn't it?

Just under a year removed from this trip, we caught up with Twiggy Baker and Ian Walsh to ask a few questions about their experiences filming this project and riding big waves. But before checking out what Twiggy and Ian had to say, we want to bring attention to the [Protect the West Coast Coalition](#). Protect the West Coast is working to raise awareness and raise money to fight the continued opencast mining being done on the west coast of South Africa. This style of mining has been outlawed for decades almost everywhere on the globe, but these companies are exploiting the legal system in South Africa and are wreaking havoc on the coastal ecosystems. [Click this link](#) to learn more about how you can help put an end to these mining operations.



Twiggy getting tuuubed. / HBO photo.

MARLOWE KUSHNER: Traveling to find new waves has always been a part of your surfing career. How did you feel after this project was over and done with? What, in your eyes made this trip different or special?

TWIGGY BAKER: Well, I think I've always just done it for myself, you know? If anything, I've had one photographer friend with me. And this was

obviously a big project, so I was really proud of myself and my team to be able to put together a project of that magnitude and pull it off successfully. It's not easy to accommodate twenty people in the desert for three weeks and we pulled it off and had a great time and no one died! We were just stoked to get the opportunity to do it at that level. It was a challenge for us, and we pulled it off.

IAN WALSH: I think sometimes the harder it is the better it feels for me. The more challenging it is the more I feel a sense of accomplishment regardless of what the surf does, and I definitely felt that on this trip. Yes, we went there with this targeted approach to identify a new big wave location, but the waves were pretty damn good the entire time we were there. We got to surf all these different waves and there was so much raw coastline with no people anywhere. I feel like regardless of how much work it is, it feels good to travel and learn from the people in that area and the culture in that area. It just feels good.



Twiggy tows Ian into a beast. | HBO photo.

MK: What were your favorite parts of filming this project? Any moments that stand out to you?

GB: Just being up there for a time with a crew like that. We've spent a lot of time traveling around the world and to be able to surf where we did,

and document it in that way was epic. The whole crew was awesome, too. We really had a good time up there. It was like a holiday, but we were working. Everyone was involved and everyone brought the good vibes to the crew. Obviously me and Ian clashed a few times picking spots or deciding where to surf, and you know I can be known to be a bit of a general on these trips to get up early and make sure everyone's on time to the area where we need to be, but besides just a few minor clashes it was just an amazing month, and I think everyone enjoyed themselves.

IW: A highlight for me was being that removed. One of my favorite things about projects like these when you're just so remote, you get to connect with the people you're with on a much deeper level. Everything becomes about who you're with and connecting with them. The everyday tasks become different when you're camping for almost a month. I enjoyed the simplicity of that. You get really in tune with where you are. It's cool to unplug from everything we have at our fingertips in society. It's a unique thing and it's refreshing. I enjoy putting myself in situations that are challenging and that test you physically and mentally. That is where you have great opportunity to grow for yourself.



Ian throws a sweet layback turn. | HBO photo.

MK: Do you think you'll return to The Peak?

GB: Yea 100 percent. We're going down to J-Bay for the event (WSL Corona Open J-Bay) and then we'll go and stay in Cape Town and surf around there until we see the correct swell for The Peak. Obviously, it needs to be bigger than the swell that we had last year, and to have cleaner conditions. I would love to see offshore winds and some big clean long period swell with good wind conditions and then we'll hit it!

IW: I definitely think I'd go back there. I would love to see what the Peak does on its day of days, you know? Seeing what the Peak could do when the swell was hardly tickling the reef left us with some good information. We were saying like if it's already starting to show some shape and showing what the channel looks like and how everything adds up for this wave, it gave me some underlying impressions of Maverick's on a smaller to medium swell. And when Mavericks gets that megalodon swell it's a whole different ballgame. So, I don't think that will be the last time I'm in that area whatsoever.



Twiggy recovering his snapped board in the shorebreak. | HBO photo.

MK: What do you want the viewers to take away from watching your episode of EOTE?

GB: I think the most important thing is supporting the [Protect the West Coast Coalition](#). We have those Australian mining companies that are just wreaking havoc on our coast. This type of mining was banned in Australia in the 70's but they're quite happy to go to these third world countries and pay off politicians and do this disgusting form of opencast mining. It's just really bad form. It's unacceptable. I would like people to see that and to look it up online and maybe make a donation and say something about what's going on.

IW: At the end of the day, what I want people to take away from this project is for people to not be afraid of a little extra work to go further.

Ian and Twiggy walked away from this mission with lots to think about and even more to discuss...

“What do we need to see for the Peak to go megalodon?”

“Who will be there to see it?”

“What did we lose? What did we gain?”

“When is ‘next time’ going to be?”

Although they did not find the exact conditions that they had hoped to find, the upsides are numerous, and they feel quite optimistic about the Peak's potential to be a premier big wave destination to be mentioned in the same breath as Nazaré, Jaws, and Mavericks.

Until next time, fellas. Thank you both for your time and good luck on whatever lies ahead!

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