

STRIKE MISSION

Taj Burrow tackles titanic Hollow Trees in an all-icon showdown.

Hollow Trees, also known as HTs or Lance's Right, is the poster wave for all things adventure and exploration. The jewel in the Mentawaian crown, HTs is a picture-perfect right found a couple of hundred metres off a pristine, palm tree flanked crescent of white sand on the West Sumatran island of Sipora. HTs boasts an alluring wall, a couple of heaving barrel sections and a deadly shelf lurking just below the surface in the impact zone, ready to claim flesh and fibreglass at the first hint of misplaced rail or ill-timed turn. Should you get caught inside, whether from straightening out or paddling out, the Surgeon's Table will happily see you straight away.

If Hollow Trees symbolises surf travel, then Taj Burrow is the spirit animal of the stoked frother who can't miss a swell, no matter where it kisses the planet. TB was FOMO-personified before the acronym existed. Surely it's a given, then, that if one of the world's most iconic surfers meets one of the planet's most revered waves the results will be spectacular, so when these shots graced our inbox we just had to talk to Taj to hear all about what went down at HTs, and the bonus mission he stumbled into afterwards.

"The Indian Ocean was lit up! The map was bright red, blobs everywhere, and I just went, "Fuck! I've got to get some good waves!" Since I retired last year I've been frantically trying to chase swells, and yet haven't ever really been in the right spot; I haven't had that perfect session. This was the time to set that straight.

"I had so many options. The West Oz coastline was primed, as was all of Indonesia, so it came down to making a call and hoping it was the right one. In the end I decided on the Mentawais, just because of how productive you can be in that part of the world.

"I was messaging every setup and camp and boat you could think of, seeing if anyone had beds or berths or whatever. The guys at Hollow Trees Resort got back straight away and they had room for me and my mate [filmer] Dave Fox for a few days, so I locked it in straight away.

"I'd always heard about HTs doing the big double-up roll-in thing when it's massive. I'd probably only ever seen it four- or five-foot, so that was a pretty exciting thought, and it totally came off – it was macking! Huge roll-ins to double-up stand-tall pits, it was incredible!





“When the swell first hit there were a couple of good ones, but it wasn’t proper pumping. There was so much swell in the ocean, but I still really wasn’t sure if I’d nailed the call; was starting to think I’d blown it again. Then it went from six-foot to eight, then 10, proper big nuggets coming in, and I just relaxed straight away and felt content that I was in the right spot.

“That afternoon it got too big. It was 12-foot and washing through, with a mysto third reef capping way out the back. It was closing out the whole bay and where the boats normally sit. It was so wild, I could never have imagined that. The next day it calmed down, and we got it eight- to 10-foot again on the way back, so we got two days of it proper firing... unbelievable!

“There was a bit of a pack, but the majority of the guys were watching and trying to pick off the

medium ones. Then there were a half-dozen of us sitting up the top looking for the big roll-ins. It was mellow; everyone was in really good spirits and taking turns. It was a sight to see, it was so fun, and it was just so awesome to finally witness it doing its double-up thing.

“HTs packs a punch, way more than people expect. It’s really heavy, but that goes under the radar a little ’cos it looks so damn perfect. Once it hits six-foot, though, it just flogs you. You get hammered and have to do a full lap around to get back out because it rinses you so hard and washes you over the shelf. It looks really user-friendly, but it can really give you a beating. It looks perfect, but it’s a serious wave.

“I only had two bad stacks, but I broke my step-up second wave of the trip, so was on a 5’10” after that, which was devastating. Once

I had the lineup sorted I was OK, though, I could pick my waves, and I definitely had more good ones than bad ones by the time we were done.

“I love strike missions. Coming from WA and having Indonesia three hours away means I can bolt up for a swell, whereas most people usually have their trips locked in months in advance. To be able to strike like that, and see the islands that alive with swell, was really cool. The Mentawai’s is the best zone on earth for surf, and so worthy of all the hype. There are so many waves that work in so many different conditions, it’s just incredible. I’m definitely going to keep trying to do hit and runs like that from here on out, and having land camp options these days makes that viable.

“I ended up jumping on a charter boat from HTs after the

swell. The Sibon Baru had a couple of spots open up on a trip, so Dave and I pounced on them and off we sailed. Turned out it was a boatload of 12 Brazilians, all black belt MMA maniacs. We were terrified at first, thinking, What the hell have we got ourselves into here? But they ended up being the biggest pack of absolute legends and were as stoked to have us as we were to jump aboard. The guys were mellow in the water, too, I was probably frothing more than them all put together. Most of them hadn’t been to the Ments before either, so I ended up turning into a bit of a surf guide; it was cool. I might have found my next career if this pro surfing thing doesn’t turn out!”

AS TOLD TO: CHRIS BINNS
PHOTOS BY: FUKU