

# Serious Surfing on the North Shore

By John Theo, Jr.

Photo by John Lawler

I can trace my love affair with surfing back to one moment in time. It started in August 1995 with hurricane Felix. The storm was down around the Carolinas pushing waves hundreds of miles north toward Cape Ann. A friend and I purchased a couple of cheap boogie boards just to see how we liked riding waves. As we drove to Good Harbor Beach that late afternoon we followed an old Saab with a couple of beat up surfboards strapped to the roof. There was a hand painted sign on the rear window, which simply read, "Felix Rules!" When we got to the beach we realized why it ruled; the waves were huge. Little did I know at the time that ten-foot-high waves, warm weather and perfectly clear skies were a rare combination for Cape Ann. Soon after I caught my first wave I also caught the surfing bug and purchased my nine-foot longboard, which I have been using ever since.

Normally when Cape Ann witnesses waves that big it is usually accompanied by snow, sleet and twenty degree weather. A drive to the beach goes hand in hand with a thermos full of hot coffee. On the radio you will not hear the Beach Boys singing *Surfing USA*, but someone like Celine Dion singing *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. You have no problem finding a parking spot because the beach and side roads are bare. You step out of your car and, in one motion, strip down and jump into your wetsuit. These are the cold hard facts about surfing on Cape Ann.

This is not to say that we don't have surfing during the summer months, just nothing that compares to the size of waves in the winter months, or in movies like *Endless Summer* or *Riding Giants*. The experience in summer is mostly small intermittent waist-high waves, but I enjoy them with a smile on my face nonetheless.

Because the waves peak for only short periods of time around Cape Ann, there is some unfortunate protectiveness and localism surrounding some of our surf spots. There are people who feel it is a rite of passage to put in your time and "earn" the knowledge of where the hidden surfing spots are located.

That being said, some well-known popular spots for surfing in the Cape Ann area (that will not get me in trouble with the locals) are Good Harbor Beach in Gloucester and Long Beach in Rockport. The best times to go are when the tide is incoming (mid-tide), but take note that surfing is restricted from 9:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m. during the summer months (June-August) while the lifeguards are on duty.

No matter how much the images of surfing have been exploited over the last few years by retailers and other media, the New England weather continues to act with its own system of checks and balances – keeping those who appreciate the ocean out there amongst their brethren, while those who are simply trying to emulate are left bundled up on the beach. You can get away with being a fair weather surfer in places that offer moderate climates and conditions such as Hawaii and California, but not in New England! While surfing on the North Shore may not offer perfect waves with 80-degree water like Costa Rica, it does offer beautiful scenery and a first-class camaraderie of passionate ocean lovers. Experiencing surfing in our area is like discovering a hidden treasure right in your own backyard.

For more information on New England surfing, weather reports and tide charts, log on to websites such as [www.cutback.com](http://www.cutback.com), [www.nesufari.com](http://www.nesufari.com), [www.nesurf.com](http://www.nesurf.com), and [www.swell.com](http://www.swell.com).

