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Surfing's Biggest Stars



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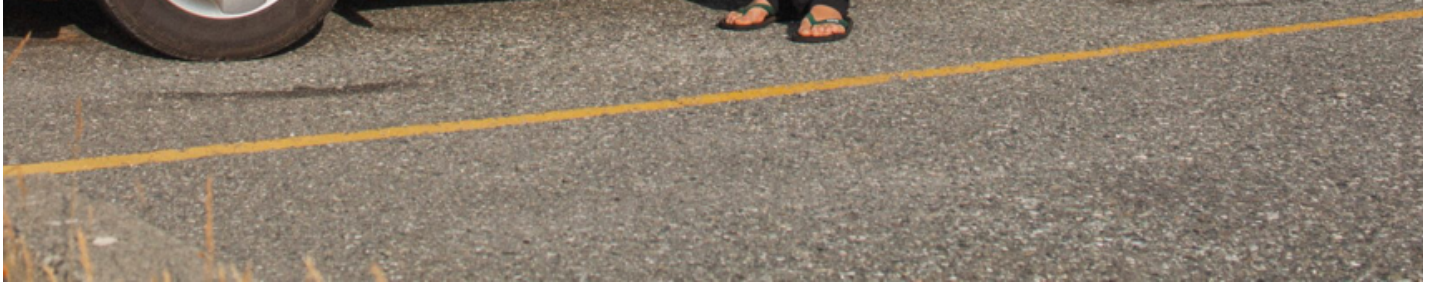
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Peter Beachy pioneered surfing America's longest wave: the Alaskan Bore Tide. He makes his living selling weed and teaching surf lessons, but a life of freedom, on his own terms, has come at no small cost. All Photos: Landon Hale [unless otherwise noted]

# Long Read: Pete Beachy Is No Bore

The life and times of an off-the-grid Alaskan surf pioneer who claims to cure cancer.

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WORDS BY GENTRY HALE

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**“There it is,” he said, pointing at a small white ripple in the water a mile or so up the Turnagain Arm, an inlet of the Gulf of Alaska just south of Anchorage.**

A single wave had started to form, so 43-year-old Peter Beachy pulled a wetsuit over his six-foot-six-inch frame. As he zipped the back, he tugged his two chest-length braids out from the neck hole and capped a neon green beanie over his head.

I discovered Beachy in a 2020 episode of *Weird Waves*, a series where

professional surfer Dylan Graves rides the world's, well, weirdest waves. I was intrigued by the idea of Alaskan surfing, so I traveled to Anchorage in August to try it myself. It was a gloomy evening when I arrived. It wasn't quite raining but on the cusp; droplets of water hung in the air. The ocean was gray and churning, laced with silt.

I met up with Beachy on the side of the Seward Highway, where he explained the technical workings of the wave as he unstrapped a 9-foot foamie from the roof of his Volkswagen Jetta. He also owns a vibrantly painted van with his company's name across the side: TA Surf Co. But on the best days, Beachy drives the Jetta. He says the van attracts unwanted attention.

Since it was my first time there, Beachy suggested I stand on the shore and observe all the facets at play. With his board in hand, he scrambled down the ledge of rocks that separate the Seward Highway from the frigid ocean and dangerous mudflats.

Local children are taught to stay away from the silt flats, which act like quicksand. Anyone stuck when the tide comes in risks drowning. In the early '80s, a woman got stuck in the mud and was ripped in half as a rescue helicopter attempted to pull her out. "It's not the friendliest place to play in the ocean," Beachy said.

Three other men had met Beachy at the parking lot, two with stand-up paddleboards and another with a prone board. They clambered down the rocks behind him as tourists pulled off the road to watch.

Beachy and the others made it to the bottom and launched into the water, catching a current going directly toward the oncoming wave. The four men spread out. With water splashing his face Beachy rode the current half a mile up the channel until he and the wave were about to meet.

Then, turning his board, Beachy paddled a few strokes and popped up on one of the longest waves in the world.

The Alaskan Bore Tide happens once in the morning and once in the evening for two weeks each month. It is determined by the phases of the moon and, under the right conditions, it can generate a wave with a 10-foot face. As the climate warms, the wave is becoming more accessible with less ice throughout the year.



The single wave occurs when the water flowing out from the narrow Arm collides with the incoming ocean tide. On its surface, the Arm is a braided mess of currents. Watching the water move from shore is like watching the liquids of a smoothie when you turn on the blender, churning and changing, unsure of which direction to flow.

Beachy only has one chance to catch the wave each time it rolls through, and he rarely misses. This is his 11th year riding the Bore. Last year he only missed 10 of the 264 waves he attempted, traveling

between a quarter and a half mile on the wave and staying on it for 10 to 20 minutes each time.

Rumbling with energy, the wave moved up the Arm with four humans scattered across it. Beachy turned back and forth across the clean, green face. Despite his size and stature, he looked graceful, commanding his longboard with ease. The wave shrunk and reformed again, taking Beachy back down the channel to where he parked his car.

All four men ditched the wave as they approached the pullout and paddled back to shore. They climbed up the rocks and ran to their vehicles. Beachy lashed his board back onto his Volkswagen in seconds. Four cars full of dripping wet surfers caravanned out of the pullout and sped down the Seward Highway, droplets of condensation flying off their vehicles as they turned into the next pullout, where they jumped out, grabbed their boards, and ran down the rocky hill back into the ocean.

Within seconds of returning to the water the wave caught up with them, and they jumped on for a second time to ride the dying end of the Bore. The wave was smaller now, but Beachy rode the whitewash for a few more minutes, making long, easy turns .

Beachy eventually emerged from the ocean with glacial-topped mountains towering behind him and a smile plastered across his face.





Peter Beachy (yes, that's his real name) lives in a secluded trailer outside Anchorage along the Turnagain Arm, where tourists and surfers from around the world pay him \$300 for the opportunity to surf America's longest wave.

Beachy's home is located only a few minutes away from the wave, which is not an accident. His property is full of plants and greenhouses growing weed and more than a dozen types of fruits and vegetables. He also has six rusty, circular trampolines fashioned in a large circle in his backyard: a homemade trampoline park for Beachy to bounce.

The outside of his trailer is lined with paddleboards, longboards, foamies and shortboards. He runs a consignment surf shop out of his

shack.

A rack of wetsuits, snowboards and multiple versions of the same neon green beanie fill the entranceway into the house. The living room has a lifted garden box along one wall and a couch on the other. Photos, posters and cut-out calendar pictures cover his walls, mostly shots of surfers and nature. The back room is a grow room, a jungle of marijuana plants in a haze of purple grow lights.

Beachy is originally from Caseville, Michigan. His father named him after basketball legend Pete Marovich, known as Pistol Pete. He too played throughout high school and recieved a basketball scholarship to Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, where he majored in geography and minored in health.

After graduating, Beachy spent four seasons working at Sugar Bowl Ski Resort in Tahoe, California. A few weeks into the 2004 season he got a call from his girlfriend, Mary Kay, in Michigan. She was pregnant.





Photo: Gentry Hale

They decided to move to Alaska and get married. Beachy got a job

teaching high school social studies and coaching basketball in Buckland (Nunatchiaq), a small Inupiat village in Alaska's Northwest Arctic Borough.

In the village of 400 people, only 12 were white, said Beachy, but he says he was accepted because of his basketball skills. The sport is a community staple in Buckland.

Mary Kay learned that she had Lupus disease while experiencing extreme complications throughout her pregnancy.

Once their daughter Scarlett was born, Mary Kay's immune system began attacking her kidneys. She and Beachy went to doctor after doctor looking for help, but nobody seemed to know what to do. Once, a nurse even warned them that the doctor they were seeing was terrible and they should go elsewhere.

"That was a big eye-opener for me," Beachy said. "I always thought that doctors were your friends. They just gave her pills but couldn't give us any answers." They put her on a concoction of medications and started her on chemotherapy. That was when Beachy began to dive into researching Eastern medicine, the power of diet, exercise and cannabis.

For four years Beachy taught school and helped raise his daughter in Buckland. He even took his students on a senior class trip to Oahu, where he tried surfing for the first time. Beachy loved village life: he let his students shoot caribou for him in exchange for passing grades, he

bootlegged whiskey into the dry town and sold it for 20 times its price, and he played basketball despite negative 40-degree temperatures.

But Mary Kay grew tired of the village lifestyle, he says, so they moved to Girdwood, Alaska, home of Alyeska Ski Resort along the Turnagain Arm. Beachy says he wanted to set goals and make yearly holistic health plans for Mary Kay, but she wanted to go back on pills.

They weren't seeing eye-to-eye.

One day, when he was away at work, Mary Kay packed up and took 7-year-old Scarlett back to Michigan, leaving without telling him.

Beachy returned home to an empty house and a note from his wife. It said that this would work out better for both of them and that Beachy would still get to see and travel with Scarlett. "Maybe she meant it at the time," Beachy said. "But six months later she was trying to take all my legal rights."

"I didn't know if I should go back to work or stay in the cannabis business after they left," Beachy said. He had started growing weed when they moved to Girdwood because he had a caretaker card which allowed him to legally do so for his wife. He had started a business selling it, finding customers via word of mouth.

"My first child support bill came, and it was for \$420, so I took it as a sign," he said. He has been making a living off weed ever since.

After divorcing Mary Kay and losing custody of Scarlett, Beachy turned his attention to the sport he enjoyed most: skiing. However, as each winter passed, he noticed seasons getting shorter and warmer, prompting him to consider a more long-term hobby.

In 2007, Beachy saw a picture of two men paddleboarding the Bore Tide on the cover of the Anchorage Daily News. He cut the photos out and put them on his fridge. The next spring, he purchased a 12-foot stand-up paddle board from Scott Dickerson, a Homer native and one of the two men in the photograph. Shortly after that, Beachy jumped into the silty Alaskan waters to see if he could catch the wave.

“The first time I paddled out was in May, and I was surrounded by eagles and glaciers,” Beachy said. “It was so beautiful, and I knew it was what I wanted to do — I could feel it.”

Beachy didn’t know when the wave was coming, where it would break or how it would flow.

Every day he would journal his experience: when the wave came, where it broke, what the weather was like, what the wind was like, how big it was and more. After years of observation and piles of journals, Beachy learned the Bore Tide better than anyone.

Now, because of Beachy, no matter what time of day or night, you can find a tight-knit crew of around ten die-hard surfers in the Arm, waiting to catch the wave each time it comes in. Beachy was the pioneer — he transformed the Alaskan Bore Tide into a popular surf



spot.



**In early November, I flew back to Alaska to spend more time with Beachy, having become more intrigued with his character than the surfing itself. He was preparing to leave for Oahu for the winter when I arrived and agreed to let me tag along as he ran errands.**

He arrived in Anchorage on Thursday morning with a to-do list on his iPhone 7. “I keep this phone because the speaker is broken and they can’t hear what I’m saying,” he said, referring to the government. Beachy doesn’t believe in paying taxes, COVID-19 or, in general, the law.

Beachy is used to being called a “crazy conspiracy theorist.” But, he believes that as soon as you refer to a theory as a conspiracy, you automatically believe it isn’t true. “I have seen so many of them come true that I think you still have to question everything,” he says. “I try to keep my mind open to all kinds of crazy things. Maybe the Earth is flat, I don’t know! I don’t think it is, but you have to let everyone have their opinion.”

On days without a wave, Beachy travels 30 minutes north to Anchorage to run errands and distribute medicine, mostly CBD, cannabis and psilocybin mushrooms, to his clients.

Beachy had spent the week prior to my visit seeing his parents in Michigan, and he was leaving to Hawaii to spend the summer with a friend the week after. He needed to pack up his house, buy some supplies and distribute enough drugs to last his clients through the winter months.

The first errand on his agenda was a trip to the grocery store for a stick of Burt’s Bees chapstick to keep his lips moisturized in the Alaskan air. It was already under 20 degrees (-6 C) in Anchorage just a few days after Halloween, and nearly a foot of snow had fallen in the last day.

Next, Beachy drove a few blocks to a dispensary. There, he pulled a large, rolled-up paper bag from his trunk and walked in.

Beachy was wearing a long-sleeve Hawaiian print shirt under a red Patagonia zip-up with Lucky brand jeans, black Vans and his usual



beanie. Beachy can be intimidating. He has an even-keeled, calm demeanor but doesn't hold back when he has something to say. He has slightly graying stubble on his chin yet looks a decade younger than he really is. His face is long and caked with a smile that widens when he chuckles his stoner giggle: slightly delayed and unusually contagious.

He towered over the dispensary owner, who seemed overjoyed to see him. He passed her the brown paper bag, full of his organic weed for her college-aged son.

Brandt helps Beachy get clients by sending customers his way when they need stronger medicine than what she can legally sell. "I have another one for you in the valley," she tells him, taking the bag. "I'll give him your number!"

Beachy grows, produces and sells powerful, highly concentrated organic marijuana products like Rick Simpson, an extremely potent THC oil that he says has cancer-curing potential. He also sells mushrooms, DMT, LSD and MDMA.

Beachy has been selling weed since he was 16 and has only been arrested once. He was 25 and living in Michigan, and he was charged for having marijuana and a taser on him. He's had a few close calls in Alaska, he says, but he's never gotten in trouble.

Since the late 1990's when growing weed with a medical card became legal in Alaska, the state's marijuana laws have changed many times. Currently, Alaska allows people to legally grow six plants per home, but

Beachy's benchmark is far above that.

“The police are not looking to bust people with marijuana,” Beachy says.

The other drugs that he sells are not a big priority either, he claims.

“They are more interested in meth, cocaine, heroin and fentanyl.”

Beachy's plant medicine business provides clients with drugs and his self-researched knowledge of holistic healing. He says he can treat chronic pain, help people overcome addiction, provide end-of-life comfort, heal acute injuries and even cure cancer.

Back in the dispensary, Beachy noticed they were selling the Ninja OG strain, which he created by mixing plants years ago. “It's still around after all these years?” he laughed. “Let me get some of that to see if it's still the same.” He put an eighth of weed into his pocket and said goodbye, then headed back to the car for his next stop: paying off a speeding ticket.



**Beachy was ticketed for speeding on his motorcycle back in August. He was going 74 in a 55 zone. After attempting to fight it in court, he accepted that he must pay.**

Beachy rarely goes the speed limit, and rarely gets caught. “My friends call it the Beachy Bubble,” he says. “I do whatever I want, and I don’t get in trouble.” He figures that one speeding ticket per year in exchange for going however fast he wants is a pretty good trade-off, especially when he doesn’t have to spend money on things like cable or car insurance.

Beachy stopped at the police station, where he learned that he can’t pay off tickets at a police station. He can’t pay online either because he only deals in cash.

Beachy's surf business is under the table (his surf lesson rate, \$300, was established because it's the maximum amount of cash you can get out of the Girdwood gas station's ATM), and his plant medicine business is breaking several state and federal laws. A friend asked him to join a legal growing operation once, and he refused, gawking at the 55%-60% tax rate. "I don't want to fund a war in Ukraine, so I don't pay taxes," he said.

Before trying to pay his ticket again, Beachy stopped at the home of one of his clients. Marie Baily is a warm and inviting 60-year-old Inupiat woman from Noatak (Nuataaq), another small village in the Northwest Borough. She gave us both a big hug as we walked in. Baily met Beachy working at Red Dog Mine in 2012, a highly toxic zinc mine in remote northern Alaska. It doesn't take long to find out who smokes weed up there, Beachy said. She has been a client ever since, but Baily says they're more like family.

Many of Beachy's clients are indigenous Alaskans who have helped keep him in business through the legalization of marijuana in the state by remaining loyal customers. We spent almost an hour in Baily's home listening to her stories and watching her grandbabies play around our feet. Beachy promised to visit her again before he left for Hawaii, and she gave us another big hug as we departed.

Back in the car, Beachy called Anchorage City Hall and the receptionist confirmed that he could pay his ticket there. He drove a few minutes back to downtown Anchorage.

Beachy walked into the building and was back within minutes. “They didn’t let me pay it,” he laughed. “These things used to upset me, but I’ve changed. Now I just accepted that everything takes longer in Alaska.”

City Hall directed him to the courthouse, where he finally paid his dues. Beachy pulled back onto the icy roads and headed toward the ocean. I asked him what was next on the list. “Time to take some dabs,” he giggled. “I’ve been sober for too long!”



Photo: Wonderlane

**YouTuber Ben Gravy traveled to Anchorage in 2019 to surf the Bore Tide, completing his goal of surfing all 50 states. Beachy was his guide.**

**“Pete is a legend,” Gravy said. “You meet him and he is a little intimidating at first because he is a huge fellow, but he is a gentle giant. He is very knowledgeable about the Bore, and he was very calm the whole time.”**

Not all people find him so welcoming, though. Beachy admits he has quite the following of haters. “A lot of people just don’t know my history, so they see me behaving a certain way and come up with ideas on why they think I am the way I am,” Beachy said. “It’s really entertaining for me, though, because they’re usually way off.”

Jon Lewis was one of the other three surfers in the water the day I met Beachy. He is a 49-year-old carpenter originally from Vermont and has been surfing with Beachy for nine years. He is one of the steady locals at the Arm and hated Beachy in the beginning. The first time Lewis encountered Beachy, he was screaming at Lewis to get out of his way on the wave.

According to Lewis, Beachy doesn’t dick around. If someone is in his way or surfing without proper etiquette, Beachy lets them hear it. Lewis has seen him drop onto his belly while riding the wave, grab a guy’s rail and toss him off the wave because the guy had cut him off. “I’ve seen him swear at girls and get confrontational with people. But he’s just trying to create order on the wave,” Lewis said. “Safety is Pete’s priority, so if people are being unsafe or not following standard surf etiquette, Pete has no problem telling them to fuck off.”



Lewis and the other locals used to get excited when they wouldn't see Beachy's van at the pullout — it was their rare chance to ride the clean part of the wave, which Beachy usually took for himself. But they would often blow it, Lewis said, melting under the pressure of not missing their opportunity.

When Beachy started TA Surf Company in 2016 Lewis was not happy. “I felt like he was selling out,” Lewis said. “He had a lot of clients, and then he had a lot of guides, and I just felt like it was whoring out the wave.”

Things have gotten much better, though. Beachy has changed a lot, Lewis said. Now they all work together and Beachy doesn't hog the wave. He is respectful with his clients and makes sure that his clients don't get in the way of the locals — because Beachy understands how it feels to have to share the wave when you don't want to.

The Bore Tide was originally used for windsurfing, kayaking and eventually paddle boarding. According to Lewis, its popularity died off after a while, and Beachy initiated the resurgence. He holds the torch, Lewis says. Most of the local crew have become friends over the years, supporting each other and having each other's backs, which is necessary given the dangers posed by the Bore.

There are no rescue options in the Turnagain Arm, and getting hurt while surfing the Bore Tide is inevitable. “If you're going enough, you're going to get spanked eventually,” Beachy says. According to Beachy, most people stick around for a season or two but once they have a bad

experience and realize that they could die, they don't return.

In late October, Lewis lost a brand-new surfboard out there. Beachy spent hours watching the Arm with binoculars seeing if it would wash up. "That's how I know that this guy really cares about me," Lewis said. When it didn't show up, the local surfers all pitched in to help Lewis buy a new one. They gave him a sympathy card full of cash. It read: "Sometimes the Bore's gotta eat. Thank you for the sacrifice." Signed, "The crew that you surf with."

"There is a really kind side of Pete that you see when you get his respect," Lewis said. "He's a sweet guy when you get him out of the water and you get past him screaming at girls or flipping people off or pushing them off of their boards."



**On my last day with Beachy we met for breakfast at Harley’s Old Thyme Cafe, one of his favorite local spots. As he ate, he talked about his daughter, Scarlett, who had recently stopped speaking to him. It happened during COVID, he says. Mary Kay took her to get vaccinated without asking his permission, and Scarlett hasn’t wanted to speak with him since.**

Beachy is an anti-vaxxer and is more than willing to share his opinions on the subject. “She said it was causing her too much anxiety to speak to me,” Beachy said. When Beachy saw her in passing last the previous week in Michigan, she turned the other way.

“So much drama and bizarre stuff have been happening lately, so it’s

kind of a break,” he says, “I am just happy that she is alive and working.” He is silent for a few moments. “Everyone keeps telling me that she’s a teenage girl and it’s just a phase.”

The biggest thing he sacrificed by staying in Alaska was time with Scarlett, Beachy says. “But since my wife took custody and more time with her wasn’t an option, I’m pretty happy that I put my energy towards surfing,” he said. “It’s been a healthy use of my time.”

Seven years after Beachy’s wife left him, he met a woman named Ashley Kearns at a Halloween party, and Beachy invited her to come work for him in his garden. Kearns had recently found a marble-sized lump in her breast, but she ignored it. “For two years I didn’t touch my breasts,” Kearns said. “I was mentally unable to deal with it.”

Kearns was immediately attracted to Beachy, and they developed a relationship.

By the time she was able to accept that she might have cancer, the lump was larger than her fist. It had spread, too. She could feel a painful mass under her shoulder blade. They went to Michigan to a naturopath, a doctor who uses only natural remedies, who told them it was cancerous and very advanced.

“I took a hard leap of faith, and I didn’t deal with it the way any other person has,” Kearns said. “I started really hammering back the Rick Simpson oil. I was pretty messy.”

Beachy maintained the garden, ran both of his businesses and cared for Kearns. Meanwhile, COVID-19 put the country into lockdown, Kearns had a close friend commit suicide and, a few weeks later, her house burned down. She moved into Beachy's trailer. It was lonely, isolating and incredibly difficult for both of them, Kearns said.



Photo: Gentry Hale

Beachy had been wanting the chance to fully heal someone with



cancer. It would legitimize his practice both to him and to judgmental outsiders, he thought.

“We manifested the person we wanted to be with,” Kearns said. “He wanted to heal somebody completely and I was completely incapable of dealing with cancer in any sort of normal fashion, or with Western medicine.”

After four months of Rick Simpson oil, meditation, acupuncture, no sugar, organic juicing and exercise, the lump had shrunk and only a tiny bump remained. Kearns went back to the naturopath who told her that the cancer was gone. She never went to a recognized medical doctor throughout the entire process.

Earlier this year, Beachy and Kearns broke up. They were in constant fight mode as they battled her cancer, and they stayed in fight mode after, Beachy says.

“The wave has been my savior through all this fucked up stuff: divorce, fighting for custody, COVID, my girl getting cancer, helping people with end-of-life care — it’s a lot to deal with,” Beachy says. No matter what changes in his life, the wave remains. He has surfed all 12 months for three years in a row. He surfs in the middle of the night with a headlamp. He climbs into the water down 15 to 20-foot ice walls that form along the Turnagain Arm in the middle of winter. He’s even had to be pulled out with climbing gear because he couldn’t get back up.

In many ways, the Bore Tide runs Beachy’s life — sometimes, though, he

has to ignore it. “I have learned not to pay attention all of the time, otherwise I would not have been able to get this stuff done today and I would have to plan my whole day around it,” Beachy says. He decides to peek at the tide chart on his phone anyway, just to check.

The wave is active around 1:30 p.m. today. He considers driving over to watch it – he can’t help himself.



**After breakfast, Beachy headed to the salon to trade micro dose mushroom capsules for a wash, trim and some curl styling products.**

**He completed a few more client drop-offs and then drove home to finish packing.**

At 1:30 we were parked at the pullout, looking out at the ocean. There was far too much ice in the water from the recent storm for him to surf, and he was relieved: watching a good wave and not surfing it is painful for him.

We sat in his car as 30 mph winds rocked it slightly back and forth. His demeanor completely changed when he saw the wave forming. It's like he was seeing an old friend. He pointed out current flows and wave mechanics — his knowledge and passion impossible to contain. We followed the wave down the channel in his car, watching icebergs tumble behind it as it pushed up the Arm.

Beachy studied it, analyzing how it would likely be rideable in the next few days. The wave rolled past and shrunk until it was a distant line of whitewash. He watched it fade away before pulling back onto the Seward Highway.

“All right baby, I’ll see you later,” he said to the wave as we drove away.

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