



Easkey Britton, who will be competing in the European Surf Championships in France this weekend, on her trip to Hawaii. Photo By NC Mundy.

Donegal's 'Queen of the waves'

A young student from a well-known Rossnowlough surfing family is currently preparing to compete in the European Surfing Championships.

Easkey Britton is a name synonymous with Donegal and Irish ladies surfing and she has already made her mark on the Irish and British surf scene.

It all began when Easkey's grandmother returned to Donegal from California with two surfboards for her hotel in the 60s and Easkey's father Barry and his brothers took up the sport.

Ireland's two-time National Champion and current British Pro Tour Champ, Easkey will be leading the Irish surfers at the European Championships.

Easkey, who took up the family sport at the young age of five, said that she is really excited about going to the European Championships to represent Ireland.

Surfing probably hit Donegal and Ireland in the Sixties and Seventies: "My dad and his brothers started it in Rossnowlough but it died down again for a few years.

"My mum used to surf as well and still goes out the odd time. The surfing scene in Rossnowlough is really booming at the moment," Easkey said.

"The kids are really get-



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ting into it, much more than when I was younger and I'll be doing some coaching for the kids with Neil [Britton] this summer at the Finn MacCool Surfing School."

"The surf is really good in Ireland, but the conditions can be very difficult a times. Whereas windsurfers need strong winds, windy conditions are tough for board surfers," said Easkey.

"Surfing is so accessible nowadays, where anybody can just go into a surf shop and hire out a wet suit and a board and go out into the water.

"That's where the danger lies," said Easkey, "I would definitely recommend to start out with an instructor in the summer and learn the basics before you go out on your own."

There is only so much you can be taught and then you have to go out and practice yourself, Easkey said.

"It isn't all as glamorous as it looks and you do have to be patient when it's rough and you have to stick at in, even in the winter."

Easkey started out on the British Pro Tour last year and she said it turned out to be a great success.

She said: "I won the tour at the very final event, which was very exciting. The great thing about the tour is you travel with the same group of surfers to every event and you just have an amazing time."

Before that Easkey's biggest success was coming third in the European Under-18s Championships.

"As surfing is getting so popular all over Europe the competition is getting very fierce, but usually France and Spain are amongst the strongest countries."

Easkey has spent the last three years concentrating on her surfing but always knew that she wouldn't want to miss out on the whole university experience.

And she won't as Easkey has just completed her first year studying environmental science and psychology at the University of Ulster, Coleraine.

"I would love to combine my studies with my passion of surfing in the future," she laughed, "The university has been so supportive when I've been away a lot during the year.

"My flat is pretty much across the road from the East Strand of Portrush so it's very handy for me to have a look at the charts and know when I can just run out to the beach and go surfing," she said.

Easkey has just finished her exams at Coleraine and will now head to France in advance of the championships to get in more intensive training and check out where the contest is being held.

"I have been to the region before and there is a French family that I am very friendly with that I will be staying with while I'm over there."

Having surfing as a hobby and indeed a career, means that you have a very valid excuse to travel to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world.

Easkey got her first taste for travelling when she went to Tahiti and became the first Irish person to surf the infamous hell-wave Teahupoo when she was a mere 16 years old and she hasn't looked back since.

"One of the most amazing trips I made was to the Galapagos Islands in March this year with a group of friends. It was just fantastic, you felt like you were in the middle of a David Attenborough documentary," said Easkey.

Easkey hopes that surfing will be promoted a lot more in Ireland, especially

on her level and that the industry sees more support for women.

Easkey's family, the Brittons, are a renowned surfing family in Rossnowlough and her younger sister Becky-Finn lately came in fifth at the World Junior Championships held in Portugal.

"I'm taking my sister on our first surfing trip together this summer when she has finished school. I've promised to do that for ages, as I am always away and she couldn't get to go with me because of school.

Easkey is an all-round girl of many talents and besides surfing also enjoys playing classical music on her flute, is an accomplished artist like her father (www.barrybritton.com) and does aikido

at university. During the summer she is also involved with the surf life saving group, a great way of keeping in shape, she said.

"Surf Life saving is very popular in Australia and the even holding regular competitions and you have to be very fit for it."

Recently, Easkey travelled to Lahinch and the Cliffs of Moher to make surf history: "I got a call from a friend telling me to get down there as surfers from all over were getting together to tow-in surf the infamous big wave break Aill na Searrach.

"There was so many surfers there from all over the world including Hawaii, California and New York. I ended up getting towed out on a jet ski, for the very first time, and

riding on huge 15ft high waves at the highest cliffs in Ireland."

Not only did Easkey become the first female surfer to do so, she also found a new addiction and is determined to get out and do some tow-in surfing as soon as possible.

Easkey has just recovered from a slight knee injury, but this week she will no doubt be back out on her board preparing for the championships.

Her name is only too appropriate for Easkey, as there is probably no place this very talented girl feels more at home than on a surfboard riding the waves.

The European Surf Championships in Les Cavaliers begin this Saturday, June 16 and will end on Sunday, June 24.



Easkey Britton, the first female surfer to take on the infamous waves of Aill na Searrach at the Cliffs of Moher. Photo By Bernard Testamale