

GREAT PIERS of CALIFORNIA

Beds: San Diegans used to come out here by buggy and wagon for a day's outing. In 1870, 200 Old Towners held their Fourth of July celebration out here, lured by an announcement promising seals on the beach, calf's head, and mussels fried, roasted and boiled, all free.

Surfing is good on the upcoast side of the pier, between here and the jetty marking the entrance to Mission Bay. If the pier is new here, surfing is not: during Ocean Beach's Hawaiian Days in 1916, Olympic swimmer Duke Kahanamoku gave a surfing exhibition.

The little community of Ocean Beach, now part of San Diego, was quiet until the '60s brought an influx of street people, attracted by the beach and relatively low rents. The result was friction between young and old and renters and owners, and bad words for absentee landlords. In one confrontation in 1968, the pier itself was cleared by the police.

Today the three-block business district on Newport is a mellow mixture of bikini boutiques, Mexican food and paperbacks, Lowndes Department Store, the Strand Theater and a big Cornet dime store, health food and a drugstore that opens at 8:00 A.M. Renters and retirees apparently agree that they want no developers or high-rise apartments. A faded bumper-strip says "Keep OB the Way it Was."

On weekends the pier is alive with fishermen and walkers and kids of all sizes. Overhead the big jets taking off from Lindbergh Field temporarily drown out conversation and the scream of the seagulls. In the Sea Dawg, someone is singing along with the radio, a sappy western number. . . "I'll be there before the next teardrop falls." Two pelicans are perched on top of the restrooms, and the brown one, Pete, is very good at catching anchovies people toss up to him. . . only sometimes one sticks sideways in his pouch, without the usual sea-water to wash it down.

The last time we were there, on a grey windy evening, we heard only the spatting of the breakers through the pilings and the muted whoosh as they broke onshore: there were no pelicans and no people, except for a few diehard fishermen. A big man in red checked shirt and cowboy hat had settled in on the bench opposite the bait shop with eight tall cans of beer. Five were already open.

IMPERIAL BEACH PIER



Imperial Beach Pier is a place you have to be looking for to find. It lies on a stretch of flat, sandy surfing beach, bracketed by the Coronado Bay Bridge and the brown hills of Mexico. Fire and storms have left the pier fishermen only a wooden stub, fifteen lampposts to the overhead sign proclaiming *Most Southwestern City in Continental U.S.*, and nine more lampposts to the end.

No bigtown flash or hustle here—the quiet neighborhood is little stucco houses and beach cottages, like Venice or Balboa forty years ago. On a crosspiece under the pier somebody has painted *Beautify IB—Kill a Junkie*. The sunset turns the clouds scarlet and rose darkening to purple, and a fisherman baits his hook, casts, leans and waits.

A young mother has brought out her baby in his stroller, and he points and jabbers at the lights on the moving water. Downcoast, the high ridge of Tijuana is pricked with points of light, and upcoast San Diego is a luminous haze beyond the long shallow arc of glowing amber beads marking the Coronado Bridge. "We lived in Georgia for seven years, and that was okay," she says, "but not like this. I'd rather live here than anywhere."

