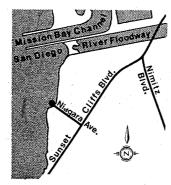
OCEAN BEACH PIER

Inlike most piers, Ocean Beach looks designed, the product of a single vision. A dynamic thrust of steel and concrete angles down toward the water and then rises, shooting over the sea to end in an unequal pair of wings, bent.

The best way to take in the whole structure at once is from its head on Niagara Street, at the top of a rocky bluff which falls away beside it. On the adjacent parking lot and beach you are about thirty feet below,



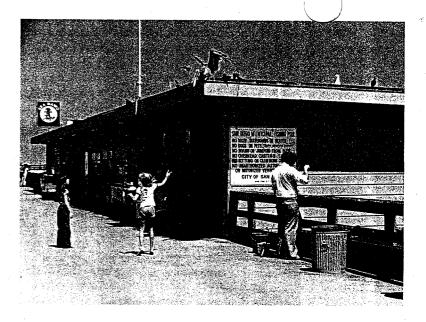
looking up at this entering ramp. A stairway leads up from beach level, and the landward end of the pier is supported by pairs of large hexagonal pillars, widely spaced.

"We wanted to leave the beach as open as possible, and we could get the equipment for the big piles in here," said Greer Ferver, the San Diego structural engineer who designed the pier.

At 1,971 feet, Ocean Beach is believed to be the longest concrete pier in the world. The northern arm of the finishing T is 193 feet long, and the southern arm extends 360 feet. In the original construction plan they were the same length; but when building was already underway, a group of enthusiastic San Diegans raised \$92,000 more to extend the arm and so increase the pier's fishing capacity. Because of this addition, the pier has a full mile of rail space.

The gull-wing shape of the arms strengthens them by presenting a staggered pattern of pilings to the waves, so that they're not all hit simultaneously. Further, the rising pier mirrors the angle of descent of the pier bottom: the water is twenty-six feet deep out at the end. Waves are bigger in deeper water, and the pier angles upward to keep its deck and everything on it out of reach of those waves. A wave's maximum height is generally 70-75 percent of the still water depth at that point.

In Southern California the controlling wave comes from two major sources, Ferver says; nearby storms, such as the chubascos off Baja California, and distant storms in the South Pacific. Waves formed there are the more serious concern of pier-builders—they travel thousands of miles, but lose very little energy till they strike the shore.



"Oh, this pier has been overtopped a few times," Ferver said. "It was the first one we built. We've learned a few things from it."

Halfway out, a bait and tackle stand provides fishermen with live bait seven days a week (if the boats have been able to go out for it), and novices can buy a hand line to try their luck. Catches here include cabezon, halibut, croaker, sharks and sand bass.

Alongside it the Sea Dawg, also open seven days a week, has fish and chips, chowder and the usual fast food. It's a neat, pleasant place with windows all around, big hanging plants and a sea-dragon figurehead; the table-tops are hatch covers which have been fiberglassed.

The pier, built in 1966 and dedicated by Governor Pat Brown, is the first pier to be built at this spot, though it had been discussed by San Diegans since 1912, at least. On the downcoast side there are rocks inshore, and tidal pools. These rocks were once covered with mussels, and an early name for the spot was The Mussel

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."

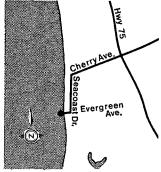
On weekends the pier is alive with fishermen and walkers and kids of all sizes. Overhead the big jets taking off from Lindbergh Field temporarily drown out conversation and the scream of the seagulls. In the Sea Dawg, someone is singing along with the radio, a soppy western number..."I'll be there before 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 Southwessern 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."