



HISTORY OF DOHENY STATE BEACH

Doheny State Beach is located about half way between Los Angeles and San Diego at the mouth of Capistrano Valley on Highway 1. San Juan (Ortega) Creek flows through the park separating the camping and day use areas.

This area is rich in early California history. Three miles north is the famous Mission San Juan Cpaistrano. This was the seventh mission in the State and was founded in 1776. It not only has the oldest standing structure in the State, but also the only remaining building in which Father Serra actually conducted Mass.

In 1818, Doheny State Beach felt the heel of the Pirate's boot as Hipolito Bouchar and his crew beached their boats on their way inland to plunder San Juan Capistrano.

In the 1830's, Yankee clipper ships anchored off shore trading supplies for cowhides. Henry Dana (for whom Dana Point was named) was a ship's crew member. Years later in his book "Two Years Before the Mast", he described this area as the most "romatic in California".

The 6,607 acre Rancho Boco de la Playa (Mouth of the Beach) was granted May 8, 1846 to Emigdio Vejar by Mexican Governor Pio Pico. Doheny was a small part of this Rancho.

Perhaps the first group camping on Doheny State Beach was in January 1847 when Commodore Robert Stockton with 600 men camped at the mouth of San Juan Creek on their way north to retake Los Angeles during the Mexican War. The present 115 campsites would easily accommodate Stockton's army.

Over the years, the Rancho changed hands and the land was eventually sold off.

After the turn of the century, the Santa Fe Railroad decided to capitalize on tourist visiting the mission by offering an additional excursion to the beach. The railroad was extended to Capistrano Beach, known as San Juan by the Sea in those days, with a turn around at the beach. Until two years ago, portions of the old track and ties were visible at low tide off of the campground.

In the mid twenties, as Ole Hansen was promoting San Clemente and Dana Point was showing signs of life, Mr. & Mrs. Edward Doheny bought Capistrano Beach, subdivided, and named their town Doheny Park.

The Dohenys built a home on the Palisades, a fine old brick mansion surrounded by landscaped grounds. The village was laid out below. A few homes were built at this time. Then the depression brought development to a standstill. In recent years, the Harvey Machine Tool Company bought the town and changed the name back to Capistrano Beach.

In 1931, Mr. Doheny deeded to the State, for perpetual public use, a half mile of beach and attractive strand. This is said to be the first beach park contributed for permanent public use. It was valued at this time by State officials to be in excess of \$1,000,000.

The Civilian Conservation Corps started work in the early thirties, constructing two residences, rest rooms, camping and picnic tables. One of the original houses and all of the original rest rooms are still in use. Many of the picnic tables are standing and in excellent condition. Two smaller residences were built by the Rangers in 1942. Private contractors completed two additional houses in 1947.

Three Hundred seventy five feet of beach frontage was acquired from the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad Company in 1942. This was probably the site of the railroad turn around used during the early boom days. Over a half mile of ocean frontage was sold to the State by the Union Oil Company in April of 1957. This is known as the Los Neitos Tract. With these additions, it gave the park over 6,000 feet of shoreline, extending in a broad shallow curve from Dana Point bluffs on the west to the old Capistrano pier on the east. This pier was removed in 1965 because of deterioration.

The State Park Commission ordered the park closed in November, 1957 because of water pollution caused by the Dana Point and Capistrano Beach sewer outfall. This was the first such instance known in the State Park System which was caused by water contamination. The park was reopened for day use only in September of 1958. Due to public demand and efforts of the park staff, camping was resumed in June 1959.

Camping and day use was permitted in both sections of the park in its early days, but because of constant flooding of the campsites and the equally constant petty larceny from campsites by many day use youngsters, camping was moved to the east and day users were confined to the west. This took place in 1963.

Over the years the tides had eroded the beach, flooded the camp areas, and caused havoc in general. In hopes of slowing the element's destructive forces, a 250' cement groin was constructed on the west side of the San Juan Channel. Eighty-six thousand yards of new material were hauled in, pushing the ocean back and adding about 100' of depth to the strand. This was done in 1964 resulting in the closing of the day use area week days from April through May. Storm drains were installed and the parking area repaved at this time.

Perhaps a more sobering realization of the silent workings of the tides is the erosion on the parcel acquired from the Union Oil Company. In 1957 this 1,500' long section was approximately 150' deep at the eastern point and 350' deep at the western end. By 1964, over half of this section had been washed away, making the eastern section unusable. Many of the park's campsites were moved back to the property line fence to keep from being washed away. Doheny's campground had its back to the wall.

In September 1965, the campground was closed and a gigantic beach fill operation was started. From the mouth of San Juan Creek to the Capistrano Beach Colony, 800,000 cubic yards of fill were hauled in, adding some 200' of width to the beach. The park had regained most of the Los Nietos Tract. This project is in the final phases and will be completed early in 1966. The cost--over one million dollars, and well worth it!

Despite the flooding of campsites, which as of now has been eliminated, people continue to come to Doheny State Beach by the thousands, some 620,000 in 1964.

The "no vacancy" sign is posted in June where it remains until after Labor Day, disappointing thousands of would-be campers.

The popularity of Doheny State Beach is very apparent. It is unique as a beach park. The highest elevation is 11'. All campsites are within sight or sound of the surf.

Out of state campers find the location ideal. Disneyland and the Angel Baseball Stadium are within minutes, the wonders of Los Angeles and the surrounding area less than an hour's drive to the north. To the south, the beautiful San Diego Balboa Park, it's marine world, and famous zoo. A few miles farther south is the charm of Old Mexico.

Surfing is extremely popular in the area and is enjoyed both winter and summer. Hundreds of surfboards dot the water from early dawn until dark.

Summer swimming is very pleasant; the water temperature ranges from the 60's to the low 70's.

For the sun bathers, the weather is comfortable and the sunshine abundant.

Many picnickers enjoy the cool grassy picnic sites which are shaded by Myoporum, Sycamore, Eucalyptus, Acacia, and Toyon trees.

Fishing, clamming, and skin diving are very popular.

People interested in marine life find many interesting specimens in the numerous tide pools at the foot of Dana bluffs.

With a lagoon at the mouth of San Juan Creek and the many trees in the area, the park is very attractive to birds, both permanent and migratory. Many birders enjoy their hobby here. An interesting find in the summer of 1965 was a pair of Cedar Wax Wings feeding their young. This is the first known nesting of wax wings south of Eureka.

The Dana Point Chamber of Commerce, in 1961, considered Doheny State Beach as the community's leading industry as a result of the business derived from the campers.

The history of Doheny would not be complete without an expression of gratitude to the people from whom we acquired our land; the Santa Fe Railroad, Union Oil Company, and especially Mr. and Mrs. Edward Doheny, after whom the park was named.

The story of the career of E. L. Doheny is one of the most colorful in the history of American capitalism. Born in Wisconsin in 1856, he graduated from high school at the age of fifteen and almost immediately a life of adventure and strenuous outdoor activity awaited him. Edward L. Doheny worked as government surveyor, a mucker, a hard rock miner, and prospector. During the '70's and '80's he had much contact with the raw elements of life, fought Indians, wild animals, and accepted danger as commonplace work. Free from vices, he never used alcohol or tobacco.

The early 1890's found him in Los Angeles, California. On the streets of the city he noticed presence of brea, or garry pitch, which clung to the wheels of passing carriages and carts. He traced this substance to a center of oil seepage downtown near Westlake Park. With an old prospector friend, Charles A. Canfield, Doheny leased a city lot and began to dig.

This operation started a frantic boom that caused 2,300 wells to be dug in Los Angeles within the next five years. From then on there was no more imposing figure in petroleum than E. L. Doheny from California.

Mr. and Mrs. Doheny were well known for their many generous and charitable contributions to both public and private agencies.

Californians owe much to the Dohenys, without them this most unusual State Park would have been lost forever to the thousands who now enjoy it.

STATISTICS FOR DOHENY STATE BEACH

1965-1966 FISCAL YEAR

*Day Use	397,065
*Camping	84,146
*Camping Turnaways	76,713
Walk-ins	<u>136,860</u>
Total Attendance	682,562

*Attendance based on 4.2 persons per car

STAFF

Carl Whitefield, Supervisor--Ranger III

Richard Menefee, Ass't Supervisor--Ranger II

Al Galli, Ranger I

Russ McDonnell, Ranger I

Leroy Berrigan, Park Attendant

Allen Trost, Park Attendant

Robert Moore, Lifeguard