

History of Del Mar

In the early days, the town of Del Mar was the first Butterfield Stage station out of San Diego on the northern route.¹ In 1882 the railroad passed through Del Mar to San Diego from San Bernardino. Del Mar is said to be named in 1885 by Mrs. T.M. Loop, wife of a land promoter, who became inspired after reading Bayard Taylor's poem, "Pasa Del Mar," or Path of the Sea, and so gave the name Del Mar to the new community.

Around 1885 Colonel Jacob Shell Taylor purchased 160-acre site overlooking the Pacific Ocean near the railroad. He built Casa Del Mar Hotel in 1886. Taylor planned the village, which was designed to be a literary and artistic center.

On January 17, 1890, the hotel, Casa Del Mar burned, a great loss to the seaside community. Colonel Ed Fletcher, of the South Coast Land Company, purchased property in Delmar and in 1910 built the Hotel Del Mar¹, which was advertised as "one the finest resort hotels in California."

In 1936 Del Mar's population was approximately 1,000, with a summer population of 1,500. Del Mar offered tourists a variety of attractions including tennis courts, golf course, an open-air heated salt water plunge, tennis courts, a fishing pier, and riding stables.

Bing Crosby and Pat O'Brian opened the Del Mar Race Track in the 1930's. The first county fair was held in Del Mar in 1936. The following the year thoroughbred horse racing began.

Johnny Burke and Bing Crosby wrote a song that now defines Del Mar, "Where the Surf Meets The Turf":

*Some people dream of moonlight on the Ganges
Some dream of where the River Shannon flows;
While others long to be on the Isle of Capri,
And some long for a Nagasaki Rose.*

*Some hope to see Samoa of Samoa
Or Bali-Bali or old Avalon,
But anywhere you please,
Ask the travel agencies,
There's one place that they'll agree upon.*

*Where the surf meets the turf,
That's the place to go.
Take a plane, take a train, take a car.
There's a smile on each face and a winner in each race,
Where the turf meets the surf at Del Mar.ⁱⁱ*

Celebrities such as Bing Crosby and Douglas Fairbanks resided at the nearby Rancho Santa Fe Estates, part of the former San Dieguito Rancho.

The City of Del Mar incorporated in 1959 with a population just over 4,000.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Stratford Inn was demolished in 1969. In its heyday, visitors included Rudolph Valentino, Jack Dempsy, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford.

¹ Later known as the Stratford Inn.

In 1983 Del Mar closed Camino Del Mar at the intersection of Jimmy Durante Boulevard, diverting traffic from the Old Highway 101 to Interstate 5.

Route Through Del Mar

In 1903 members of the San Diego Joint Street Committee met to discuss the proposed automobile road from San Diego to Del Mar.

[T]he general opinion was that it should be go by way of La Jolla to the summit above Sorrento and along the present road through Sorrento to Del Mar. A force from the city engineer's office went out yesterday to set the stakes for the Scripps boulevard from Pacific Beach to La Jolla. This will connect at La Jolla with the Scripps boulevard to Miramar, making a continuous oiled road that could be used as part of the automobile road from Pacific Beach to the Sorrento grade. This work is being done by private capital, so that the city would find it necessary to only construct the road from here to Pacific Beach and from the top of the Sorrento grade to Del Mar, some twelve or fourteen miles altogether. The general sentiment of the members of the street committee is that the council should do whatever it can to encourage Mr. Scripps in his boulevard building by constructing additional roads, such as the proposed automobile road.^{iv}

After surveying in 1906, County Supervisors agreed to expend \$2000 on the coast route through Del Mar. It was general consensus that the worst portion of the coast route was near Del Mar and Sorrento. Motorists were forced to drive their autos “body deep in mud for a long distance.” In addition, the city council surveyed the Sorrento slough and it was decided to “move a portion of the road to higher ground by the Torrey pines and to build a bridge so that the Sorrento bad spot will be put in excellent shape for autos or farm wagons, or anything else on wheels.”^v

The route from Del Mar to La Jolla was described in an early publication: From Del Mar the road leads down into a deep valley, at the bottom of which it passes under a railroad trestle there is a fork to the left which leads to San Diego by Rose Canyon. The Coast Route ascends the picturesque grade to Torrey Pines and follows along over the high plateau to La Jolla. Road in fine condition. Del Mar to La Jolla, 8 miles. Hotels and garages in Del Mar and La Jolla. At La Jolla are the famous sea caverns.^{vi}

The board of supervisors met in March of 1907 to discuss the road particulars. At Del Mar the coast road was slated to be “straightened” and follow the west side of the Santa Fe track. Subscriptions of \$6,000 had been raised from South Coast Land Co., J.D. Spreckles, F.W. Scripps, Thum Bros. and others.^{vii}

In 1908 engineers employed by the County Road Commission were at work just south of Del Mar. They were following the previous road “pretty closely” but had plans to

make changes to the road “should the highway be made a part of a system of improvement under the proposed bond issue.”^{viii}

In 1910 J.W. Brite of Long Beach donated property along the coast road near Del Mar. The highway commission had begun condemnation proceedings for the right of way. This was the last needed piece by the county to complete the Del Mar route.^{ix}

The State Highway Commission approved plans to resurface the coast road in 1912. By March of 1913 the first section, from Del Mar to Encinitas, was nearly completed.^x San Diego councilman Adams sought to pave the 20-mile stretch of city road connecting San Diego city limits to Del Mar, where the State Highway ended.^{xi} Later that year, the road from San Diego to Del Mar was finished and the section from Del Mar to Oceanside was under construction.^{xii}

The elements took its toll on the coast road, chiefly rain, especially during the winter months. In February of 1915 the newspaper reported that at Del Mar a “slow order” had been in force where the road had been damaged by high tides.^{xiii} However, by June, the Automobile Club reported the road from Oceanside to Del Mar was complete.^{xiv}

The following year, the highway would take a harder hit with the January 1916 flood, which damaged roads and wiped out bridges throughout the county. The wooden bridges at Del Mar and Cardiff were gone and the concrete bridge in the process of being built was damaged. Crossing the swollen waters was done by ferry. A family had to be rescued near Del Mar at the San Dieguito river, which was one and half miles wide. It took five hours to arrive at the house and “in the nick of time as the water was several feet deep in the dwelling and the family consisting of man, wife and two children were perched on a table.”^{xv}

After the 1916 flood, many of the coastal towns were isolated after bridges were made impassable. Mail delivery from San Diego was stopped for over two weeks. Messrs. Dawes and Palmer of the Reliable Auto Line made the trip across flooded rivers and broken bridges, some of the way in autos and some on foot. They received help from the South Coast Land Co. who provided a boat at Sorrento. At Del Mar, over the San Dieguito, another boat crossing was necessary and the railroad bridge was used at Cardiff, while the men carried the mail sacks on their backs.^{xvi}

In 1917 from Del Mar the coast route traveled south, past the Stratford Inn, crossing the railroad track to Sorrento Canyon, then to Torrey Pine grade, taking a right turn at a fork in the road down the grade, then turning right on Prospect Avenue to La Jolla.

In August of 1919 a contract was awarded for a new bridge over the San Elijo river at Cardiff.^{xvii}

Widening of the coast highway began in 1923 with work being done from the northern limits of Del Mar to Oceanside. With this widening, the coast highway would be 18 feet wide. A number of line changes would also take place on the route which include an overhead crossing at Del Mar between the Stratford Inn and the railroad station, eliminating a hazardous railroad crossing.^{xviii}

By 1924 the state reported that “Rapid progress is being made by Jahn and Bressi on the contract for widening and repaving the highway between San Diego city limits and

Oceanside. With the exception of about a half mile laid only half width, the work has been completed between San Diego city limits and Del Mar. Considerable work also has been completed north of Del Mar.”^{xix}

M.E. Whitney of the Highway Department oversaw construction of the overhead crossing, a “girder-type” bridge with “45, 47 and 28 foot spans” which was completed in June of 1927.^{xx} Jahn and Bressi completed the approaches to the bridge as well as completed highway work at Del Mar.^{xxi}

The California Highway Department performed its semiannual count of traffic in July of 1928. Stations were set up around the state, including one at the Del Mar at the Santa Fe railroad crossing where it was estimated that 8,005 cars traveled that route. The counts were performed by the Division of Highways on the Sunday and Monday nearest the middle of January and July from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day at 836 stations. First begun in 1920, the count provided information which served as “a guide in the planning of new construction and reconstruction of roads and bridges and in the allocation of maintenance funds”.^{xxii}

A major alignment at Sorrento Canyon was completed in 1932. Nearly 10 miles of winding roadway and steep grades were replaced by “9.4 miles of comparatively straight alignment and uniformly low grades.”^{xxiii}

In addition, the crossing under the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway through a subway was found to be inadequate. It was found more “feasible and economical to make an overhead crossing with an entirely new line”. The subway, however, was not abandoned but used to “serve the local travel in Sorrento Canyon and separate it from the through highway.”^{xxiv}

Major highway projects which were top priority for 1935 included completion of State Highway 101 to full state highway standard between Encinitas and Del Mar and between Oceanside and the north county line.^{xxv}

In 1937, 6 1/2 miles of highway from Encinitas to Del Mar were completed which was a portion of new improvements that resulted in the coast route being faster and safer. In fact it was claimed that the improvements trimmed two hours off the route from San Diego to Los Angeles.^{xxvi} Of course, a major contribution was the Rose Canyon project that bypassed the Torrey Pines Grade.

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- ⁱ *Southern California At A Glance*, 1930
- ⁱⁱ *San Diego Union Tribune*, April 9, 1981
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Del Mar, A Community We Serve*, July 1969
- ^{iv} *San Diego Union*, July 30, 1903 “Route of The Automobile Road”
- ^v *Oceanside Blade*, Saturday, March 24, 1906 “For A Coast Road”
- ^{vi} *Panoramic Automobile Road Map and Tourist Guide Book of Southern California*, Season 1914-1915
- ^{vii} *Oceanside Blade*, March 16, 1907 “Bridges For Coast Road”
- ^{viii} *Oceanside Blade*, Saturday, July 4, 1908 “Road Is Inspected”
- ^{ix} *Oceanside Blade*, July 9, 1910 “Donates Right Of Way”
- ^x *Oceanside Blade*, Saturday, February 22, 1913 “San Diego Bankers To Finance Highway”
- ^{xi} *Oceanside Blade*, Saturday, July 26, 1913 “Will Better Coast Road”
- ^{xii} *Oceanside Blade*, Saturday, September 13, 1913 “Contract Let To San Diegans For Highway to Las Flores”
- ^{xiii} *Oceanside Blade*, February 13, 1915
- ^{xiv} *Oceanside Blade*, June 19, 1915, “The Coast Boulevard”
- ^{xv} *Oceanside Blade*, January 22, 1916, “Southern California Suffers in Grip of Destructive Floods”
- ^{xvi} *Oceanside Blade*, February 5, 1916, “First San Diego Mail Monday”
- ^{xvii} *Oceanside Blade*, August 9, 1919
- ^{xviii} *Oceanside Blade*, November 22, 1923 “Soon To Start On Highway”
- ^{xix} *California Highways*, June 1924
- ^{xx} *California Highways*, June 1927, “Bridge Department News”
- ^{xxi} *California Highways*, July 1927
- ^{xxii} *California Highways and Public Works*, July-August 1928, “The July Traffic Count”
- ^{xxiii} *California Highways and Public Works*, October-November 1932, “Sorrento Overhead Involved Problems”
- ^{xxiv} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxv} *San Diego Union*, November 18, 1934 “Highway Open To Autos”
- ^{xxvi} *San Diego Union*, August 15, 1937, “Driving Time Cut on Coast Route”