

TREASURES
OF OUR
LOCAL
OCEAN



Oil Development

Black Gold

Have you ever wondered why there are so many oil rigs off our local beaches? I know we have. It's because we have very large underground deposits of oil in the ocean floor and along our coast. These deposits don't occur everywhere!

The Chumash took advantage of this naturally occurring oil. They collected the oil (tar) from the beach to glue their 'tomols' – large wooden canoes -- together. When Spanish explorer Juan Cabrillo was exploring in the Santa Barbara Channel region (SBC), he saw a large group of Chumash building tomols in an area that he then decided to call "Carpinteria," or "carpenter's area." Carpinteria was an important area for working on the tomols because of the large natural oil seeps there. You can still see these seeps at Carpinteria beach. Tar oozes straight out of the ground there. It is amazing to see, but watch where you step!

The uses for oil have since expanded and the methods of gathering it have changed. When gasoline was first developed as a fuel for automobiles, more oil was needed. California, and specifically the SBC, became a hot spot for oil development. 'Offshore' oil was first produced in the United States right here, off wooden piers in Summerland. Although these piers did not reach very far offshore, they made it possible to produce oil from shallow ocean areas. It took almost another 30 years to develop enough technology to build the first stand-alone offshore oil platform that could get oil from deeper ocean areas. Again, the SBC made U.S. history in

1958 by becoming home to the first truly offshore oil rig – Platform Hazel – about one mile from shore in about 100 feet of water.

Today, there are 26 oil platforms off the coast of California, with 16 located here in the SBC. These rigs give us oil and gas used to run our cars and heat homes, among other things. The SBC rigs are anywhere from 2 miles (Platform Holly) to 10 miles (Platform Gail) offshore. They are in water ranging from 95 feet deep (Platform Gina) to 1075 feet deep (Platform Heritage). They sure have come a long way from just drilling off of piers.

You may be wondering how the platforms get their names. We, the Big Blue Reporters, don't fully know, but we know that the first letter of the platform name is determined by where the platform is located. Here in the SBC, the names begin with a "G" if they are in the more southerly part of the Channel toward Ventura. Those in the northern part of the Channel off of Santa Barbara have names that begin with an "H". "Irene" is the most northern platform in California, just around the corner of the SBC. The southern most platforms in California near Long Beach all have names that begin with an "E" like Edith and Eva. Pretty neat, don't you think?

As you can see, oil, or black gold, remains an important and valuable natural treasure of the SBC. Something to keep in mind next time you gaze at the rig lights at night or get a gooey glob of naturally occurring tar on your feet after walking along the beach.

FUN FACT

Some oil platforms are taller than the Empire State Building.



Naturally seeping oil.