

Southeastern

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Riverside Secluded beach possesses charm

By David Collins
Day Staff Writer

NEW LONDON — It is the city's forgotten beach on the other side of the tracks. In fact, it is right beside the railroad tracks.

It doesn't have a boardwalk, rides or food concessions. There is no admission fee and there are no lines. On many days, there are no people at all.

"It is pretty quiet here. No, it's boring," said Jack Cochran, the beach lifeguard who has never had to rescue anyone, or even go into the water.

This is the city's other beach, a small sandy strip on the Thames River at Riverside Park that is on the opposite side of the city from Ocean Beach Park and worlds apart.

While Ocean Beach attracts thousands, Riverside may get only a few sunbathers on the hottest of days. Ocean Beach is in on the edge of the city's wealthiest neighborhoods. Riverside is closest to its poorest.

There are signs throughout the city directing travelers to Ocean Beach Park. But the only way to get to Riverside beach is to wind through the narrow park roads and cross a narrow, unmarked railroad trestle.

And while Ocean Beach boasts a vast blanket of clean sand, Riverside is a pebbly beach that is almost lost at high tide.

Yet there are charms to this secluded spot. And Riverside has its admirers who complain that the city does not devote enough attention to the beach or properly maintain it.

"There are not too many people here and the scenery is better than at Ocean Beach," said Helen King.

A 75-year-old resident of nearby Cole Street, Mrs. King swims almost every day at the beach and is surely its biggest booster.

She arrives early every morning and spends most of the day. She prepares to go home when the shadow narrows in front of an old log she has upended on the beach, a makeshift sundial.

She picks up the trash, cleans the glass out of the sand and has tried to push back some of the heavy stones in a seawall that is collapsing.

But she says things are deteriorating so quickly she can't keep up with them.

"I think the city sort of counts on me cleaning up down here," she said. "The city won't fix it



Lifeguards Diane Turello, left, and Susan Pickering survey Riverside Beach

up, and it's too bad. This is really a nice spot."

On many days Mrs. King is the only person to visit the beach, although she said there are more new visitors this year than she has seen other seasons. A group of camp children also swims there every morning and afternoon.

One recent visitor was Blanche Moran of Garfield Avenue, who came with her husband and their five children.

"This is our first time here this year, but we came last year," said Mrs. Moran. "To be honest, there are a lot fewer distractions here than at Ocean Beach. And it is cheaper."

"The kids have a chance here to see that they can have a good time just sitting in the sun and playing in the water without having to go off in a lot of different directions."

But Mrs. Moran also complains that Riverside does not get the same attention as Ocean Beach.

"It is not cleaned here every day," she said. "The kids pull glass out of the sand and there is more trash. You really have to depend on your neighbors to pick up after themselves."

The Riverside beach is direct-

ly beside the Central Vermont railroad tracks and just beyond the railroad's work yards. The only access to the beach, located between the Gold Star Memorial Bridge and the Coast Guard Academy, is across an old steel trestle that carries only foot traffic.

On the other side of the tracks, however, is a red brick bathhouse where rest rooms and showers are available. And just beyond the bathhouse are some of the park's picnic areas and tables.

These areas, too, were largely deserted on a recent sunny afternoon.

Cochran, who is lifeguard at Riverside this year for the first time, is one of three lifeguards who work at the beach. He said there is usually little to do except read.

"I have finished five books so far," he said.

Cochran said he has not been in the water yet this season, and adds he hears complaints about the quality of the water. "It looks pretty dirty sometimes," he said.

The dark brown color of the water and the debris that occasionally floats to shore bothers some people and keeps them out



There's plenty of room for water games at Riverside Beach

of the water, Cochran said. However, Marijane Mitchell, city health director, said the water is tested routinely and is safe for swimming.

"If there were any problems there I can assure you we would close the beach," said Ms. Mitchell, adding the bacteria

levels are sometimes better at Riverside than at Ocean Beach. "The river has a higher concentration of fresh water, and sometimes you get a different kind of organic growth," she said. "Clear water is not always clean. You just can't tell by looking at it."

The beach also draws a small number of fishermen. "I come here off and on," said Frank Romanski of Blinman Street, who sets traps for crabs just offshore. "The water here is good for swimming, and it's good for fishing. It's a good spot."

John Ugan