

L.A. THEN AND NOW

# In 1974, nuders made news at Venice Beach

Suddenly, an area known more for bongos was dotted with bare behinds.

STEVE HARVEY

Retired lifeguard Nick Steers still remembers the day he helped rescue an injured swimmer at Venice Beach while onlookers gathered around him.

"I'm on my hands and knees and I look around and all I see are crotches" and other private parts, he said. "Everyone was nude."

As he recalls, the injured swimmer was also devoid of a bathing suit.

It was 1974, the summer of Venice's nude beach.

Until then, Venice had been a relatively quiet area except for the occasional beat of a bongo drum. This was before the era of the street performers and roller-skaters on Ocean Front Walk.

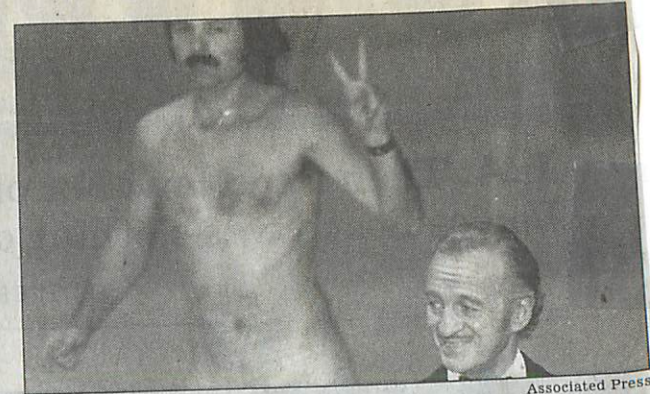
Suddenly the beach was dotted with bare behinds, "like a constellation of moons turning pink in the sun," wrote The Times' Charles Powers.

Pedestrian and airborne traffic increased like never before. Cameras were everywhere. Even opera glasses.

"It became a 'freak show,'" author Jeffrey Stanton wrote in "Venice California: Coney Island of the Pa-



IN THE BUFF: A streaker races past L.A. outfielder Willie Crawford at Dodger



BARING IT: At the 1974 Oscars, a man later identified as Robert Opel streaks behind host David Niven.

'They may watch for an hour at a time ... staring in silence, as if they had stumbled onto an assembly of Martians.'

— CHARLES POWERS, Los Angeles Times reporter, about people gawking at nudists at Venice Beach

bled onto an assembly of Martians," Powers wrote. Low-flying helicopters were "frequent and leisurely, as if the pilots had decided to pause there to tie their shoelaces," Powers wrote. "It may soon be necessary to install radar and air-traffic controllers in the lifeguard stands."

warmly. Los Angeles City Councilman John Ferraro declared that "the beach is for young people and families, not for people who want to display their wares in public."

In mid-July, the Los Angeles City Council passed an ordinance banning nude sunbathing.

The session was interrupted by a spectator who disrobed "in view of a stunned overflow audience of nearly 400." The Times reported.

The measure was signed by Mayor Tom Bradley, who explained that the "bulk" of his mail on the subject was "against nudity."

A proposal to establish "clothing-optional zones" was rejected.

Venice's nude beach ceased to be.

"But it was too late to