

# Barrier Island Beaches Only As Old As Pyramids

BY BILL MCGOWAN

Up until about 5,000 years ago, beachgoers looking for a good time in the sun and sand may have stopped briefly in the Brunswick County area for a cold drink.

But back then, tourists still had a two or three day wait before they got their first breath of salt air and their first glimpse of the ocean blue.

Today's beach residents and tourists may just take for granted that Brunswick's barrier islands

have been here forever. Fact is, though, that our barrier island beaches are only slightly older than the pyramids of the great Egyptian pharaohs.

According to Spencer M. Rogers Jr., a coastal engineer with the N.C. Marine Resource Center at Ft. Elisher, North Carolina's barrier islands did not come into existence until about 5,000 years ago. The islands were formed, he said, following a rapid rise in sea level at the end

of the last ice age when ocean water, frozen in glaciers, melted.

"Only then were the barrier islands formed," Rogers said. "Most people take for granted they have been here forever, but it has actually

been a brief time in geological terms."

Rogers said sea level 25,000 years ago was roughly where it is today. About 15,000 years ago, during the last ice age, sea level was about 350

feet lower than today.

Before the glaciers began to melt and the sea level began to rise, he said, "what shoreline there was located about 75 miles offshore of today's beaches."

## Bring Sunglasses Aboard To Prevent Eye Damage

If you spend a lot of time boating on salt water, be sure to wear a good pair of sunglasses. Prolonged exposure to bright sun and salt water can result in pterygiums, an eye affliction commonly found among serious saltwater sailors.

The U.S. Olympic Yachting Committee reports that pterygiums are fleshy, benign growths found on the surface of the eye. They can impair eyesight, but the major effects range from scratchy "sand in the eyes" discomfort to disabling pain. The growths are caused by a combination of salt water abrasion and ultraviolet damage to the eye.

Pterygiums are not a problem among fresh water sailors.

Damage from this affliction is permanent, and the best cure is prevention. Pterygiums can be removed surgically, but usually reappear within several years. Wearing a good pair of sunglasses—and a hat with a brim—will prevent the disease. Be sure that the sunglasses are not simply dark lenses, but have the capacity to absorb ultraviolet light. If your eyes become scratchy and sore while boating on salt water and you suspect you may have pterygiums, consult an ophthalmologist for a diagnosis.



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