

Hurricane!

Beach life begins again

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YAUPON BEACH — All was calm in my hometown this weekend, as residents and homeowners in this hurricane-swept community raked yards, compared damages and, generally, counted their blessings.

Hurricane Diana had blown through here twice since my last visit, and the storm had definitely left a mark. In Long Beach and Caswell Beach, the wind and water had cut paths through the several oceanfront cottages and left them damaged beyond repair. But here, and in nearby Southport, Diana was

increasingly looked upon as an interruption to a slow, quiet way of life.

Friday evening found most of the island without power, and as the N.C. National Guard watched the roadblocks barring the way to the oceanfront highways, my dad and I eyed a few sandwiches by the light of an electric lantern.

By late Saturday, power had been restored to almost the entire island, and food spoilage had joined the ranks of the storm's toll.

Long Beach Mayor Ben Thomas

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updated the situation yesterday. "There was quite a bit of damage. I imagine about \$5 million." Most of the injuries to homes will have to be paid by insurance companies, while the towns' major problems will be repairing eroded streets and battered utilities, he said.

We were lucky — our house had received only as much damage as most others. Tree branches and green leaves stood at least two inches deep everywhere in the county, but considering the number of trunks which came through people's roofs, there was little complaining.

In fact, there seemed to be only one common gripe: "the darn news media." Early Thursday morning, it was "somehow" reported that Southport had been leveled and half of the Brunswick Nuclear Reactor was missing — a feat that would have left little of that part of N.C.

"My daughter was in tears when she finally got through to us on the phone," said Dorothy Piper, of 305 Mercer St.

In reality, only four homes were devastated beyond repair, mainly because of damage caused by water and rain. Houses up and down the oceanfront are missing shingles and plywood, while most homes were left with 3 inches of foliage fallout.

Before Diana had made her round-

house sweep down the coast, many locals were refusing to believe, but not refusing to leave.

"Hell, ain't no hurricane coming to Long Beach," a friend's dad remarked, "can't get no damn permit."

Dorothy and her husband, Peter, had been the last ones over the bridge to an evacuation shelter Tuesday, they said. But after spending the night in the gym of a county school, when they heard of the hurricane's path, they decided their house would be just as safe Wednesday night.

"It was raining sheets of rain," and you could see whitecaps on the 4 inches of water in the street, Peter Piper said. But the Pipers went to sleep, forgetting about the storm. "To me this was nothing like some blizzards we've been through (in Poland, Ohio)," he said, "knowing you're going to be stuck for two or three weeks."

But most people who could leave, did, Thomas said. "We had 98 percent evacuation on Tuesday. I think everyone realizes that we were extremely fortunate — extremely fortunate," Thomas said.

Hurricane Diana had blown through here twice since my last visit, but it had not been a storm of "epic" proportions and — more importantly — it had not been a killer.