

THE GHOSTS OF SUGARLOAF

By Larry Maniscalco, History Docent

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The area in and around Sugarloaf Ridge State Park has a rich history of habitation by Native-Americans, homesteaders and ranchers, periodic use by hunters, hikers, campers and stellar and solar observers, and even use as a Boy Scout and Camp Fire Girls summer camp during the Great Depression. But there is another side of the park's history, a darker side involving deaths by accident, suicide or foul play.

INCIDENT #1: THE BIG BOOM AT FITZSIMMONS RANCH

There are very few facts recorded about the first death by suicide in the area that is now Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. All that is known is that a man name Johnson (either a homesteader or ranch hand) in 1915 committed suicide by the unusual method of blowing himself up. In an interview with Francis and Hazel Hurd, who lived with their parents Ray and Bertha and their five siblings on the Hurd Ranch homestead, Francis said that, "We had some neighbors by the name of Johnson's and there was, I know, two kids in that family and I think they lived on the Fitzsimmons Ranch. But anyhow, Mr. Johnson decided he had enough of this life and he took a stick of dynamite and went on one of them rock outcroppings or stumps and lit the fuse and sat down on it."

Source: "Hurd Family Oral History", by Linda Gresham, Unit Ranger of Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, August 27, 1983.

INCIDENT #2: A PLANE CRASH NEAR BRUSHY PEAKS



On December 10, 1964, Long Beach oilman, Clinton A. Petrie, age 48, landed his blue-and-silver twin-engine Cessna 310 aircraft at the Nut Tree Airport in Vacaville for refueling. Petrie had departed Long Beach a few hours earlier and was headed for Santa Rosa, where he was scheduled to pick up two potential investors for his struggling oil

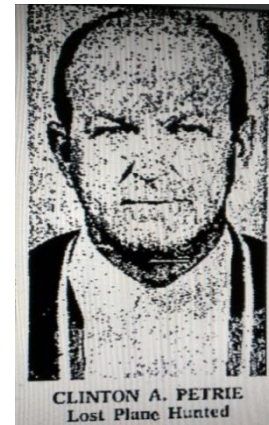
company and fly them back to Long Beach. It was almost time to make payroll and Petrie and the oil company he owned were having a hard time making ends meet. With the money from some new investors in the company's account, the payroll could be made. Clinton Petrie was on a mission to keep everything together. (Petrie's Cessna 310 would have looked like the model pictured above.)



When he departed Vacaville around 10:30 in the morning, Petrie radioed the airport in Santa Rosa. The controller who answered advised Petrie that the weather was deteriorating and that a winter storm was rolling in. Petrie was an experienced pilot, but he was not instrument certified. In spite of the bad weather, Petrie continued on toward Santa Rosa, following a route that would take him over the Mayacamas Mountains. At about 11:00 that morning, in zero visibility, Petrie slammed his

aircraft into the top of a ridge near Brushy Peaks. Although dozens of planes from the Civil Air Patrol were sent out to search for the crash site, it wasn't until after the weather had improved on December 12 that the remains of the plane, were found. (The photo on the left shows some of the remains of Petrie's plane.)

Clinton Petrie was born on February 24, 1916 in Monument, Colorado, but grew up in Long Beach, California. As a young man, he worked in the oil fields in southern California and later in Burma, where he lived for a time with his first wife, Virginia, an accomplished musician and big-band singer. Following the Japanese invasion of Burma in WWII, he and Virginia fled to Bombay and then were evacuated to the U.S. aboard the *Brazil*, which narrowly missed being torpedoed by pursuing Japanese submarines. Later in life, Petrie went into business as a partner in the Bunting and Petrie oil well drilling firm. Clinton Petrie's son, Clinton Roy Petrie, has written several novels and books on aviation under the pen name, Roy Mc Shane.



Source: "Regarding a Plane Crash at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, Sonoma County, California," by E. Breck Parkman, October 22, 2012, Science Notes Number 200, California State Parks Diablo Vista District.

INCIDENT #3: THE SKULL IN BEAR CREEK

It was close to dark on October 30, the day before Halloween 1980, when Greg Gilbert and his wife who were hiking cross-country in the area near Bear Creek wandered onto a surprising find. "We were about 1/3 of a mile from Adobe Canyon Road and about 500 feet down into the canyon when we saw what looked like a large puffball. When we went to look at it, we came face-to-face with a grimy human skull," said Greg. There were also a number of non-human bones scattered about the area in no recognizable pattern. Greg took the lower jawbone of human skull for evidence but reconsidered, thinking that it ought to remain exactly where it was found.

Once out of the canyon, he reported his find to the Sonoma County Sherriff at a nearby sub-station and a detective was dispatched to investigate the matter. Greg gave his statement to

the detective and, because he had hiked the area more than his wife, was asked to ride with the detective in the Sheriff Department's helicopter to spot the site from the air. "A detective later called and told us that they had identified the remains by finding a wallet nearby the site where the bones were found," he said. The wallet contained the ID of a Mr. Scott Peterson and approximately \$1,000 dollars. Peterson was identified as having been born in 1953 in Longmont, Colorado, which is located in northeastern Boulder County, 34 miles from downtown Denver. The detective had located and talked with Peterson's parents who still lived in Longmont and they had requested contacting the Gilberts. "They subsequently called and we spoke with them at some length – 30-60 minutes, I guess. They wanted to know all about the area in which the remains were found and more about Sonoma County," said Greg. "Interestingly, it turned out that the parents and my wife knew some people in common from the Longmont area," he added.

Greg discovered from the elder Peterson's that Scott had been a member of the Unification Church (see description below). He was a "Moonie" and apparently had told his parents that his spiritual advisors requested that he not speak with them and had not done so for a year. Greg Gilbert had heard stories of a Moonie encampment along Trinity Road or Cavedale Road, south of Sugarloaf Ridge State Park during the period 1970-1974, and had observed a group of Moonies selling flowers at the corner of Napa Road and 8th Street East.

The detective could find no probable cause of death by violence, suicide or animal attack and had placed the approximate time of death at from 6 months to two years prior to the Gilbert's discovery. Greg Gilbert recounted the story of a former friend that he and his wife encountered by chance at a nightclub in Cotati. "She was skittish, like on a psychedelic trip, she feared for her life and was looking for a safe haven," he said. The friend had been with the Unification Church and was selling flowers in Texas and rose to become a bookkeeper. In that privileged position, she had become aware of a very large income from, ostensibly, selling flowers – large enough to raise her curiosity if not suspicion. She questioned the income and became the victim of "sexual shenanigans" against her. She shared her concerns with a close associate, who later "disappeared", according to Greg. The friend later became a witness at a congressional hearing called to investigate the Unification Church, which for Gregg validated stories about rumored Moonie killings.

Source: Interview with Greg Gilbert, by Larry Maniscalco, Park Historian, October 11, 2014

A note about the Unification Church:

The official title of the Unification Church is *The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity*. It was officially founded in 1954 by Sun Myung Moon (which has led to the referring of his followers as "Moonies") and moved to America in 1959, where he established his international headquarters. Born in Korea in 1920, Moon claims that in 1936, when he was 16, Jesus Christ appeared to him on Easter morning on a mountainside in Northwestern Korea and told him that God had chosen him for the mission of establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, a mission that Christ had only begun. Christ supposedly told Moon that he would be

the completer of man's salvation by being the Second Coming of Christ. In 1945 Moon returned to Pyongyang, the capital of communist North Korea, where he set up his first church.

There, according to reports, Moon involved his congregation in an unusual ritual known as "blood separation," during which female members of the church were required to have sex with him to cleanse themselves of Satan's influence. In 1948, North Korean authorities arrested and jailed Moon (he spent two years in a labor camp), accusing him of bigotry and adultery. Moon was finally liberated by United Nations' troops during the Korean War (1950). Still today, Moon's sermons focus on sex and the idea of female submissiveness. In 1995, on "True Parents Day," he observed, "Woman was born to connect in love with man's sexual organ. Man and woman's sexual organs are the place of the true love palace." After the Korean War, Moon fled to South Korea and established the Unification Church, which now claims three million members in more than 120 countries (about 40-45 thousand U.S.), but both these figures are believed by many to be grossly exaggerated. The largest concentration of Moonies resides in Korea and Japan. In 1956, Moon published the English version of the *Divine Principle* as the authoritative work of the Unification Church.

This Unification Church has been the subject of much negative U.S. publicity, primarily due to alleged unethical recruitment and fund-raising tactics and Moon's authoritative leadership style. In 1982, Moon was convicted of federal income tax fraud, for which he served 11 months of an 18-month sentence in federal prison beginning in the summer of 1984. The Unification Church of America was founded in 1972 and is headquartered in New York City. To train those interested in joining the movement, the Unification Theological Seminary was established in 1975 at Barrytown, New York, with the goal of unifying all theological beliefs. Its faculty is drawn from Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox backgrounds, as well as from the Unification Church. Its mission statement reads, "To inspire Christian denomination and all the world's religions to supersede their separateness and cooperate for the attainment of God's will."

Source: rapidnet.com

INCIDENTS #4 & 5: THE BODIES IN SONOMA CREEK

During the late 1980's or early 1990's the intact body of a murdered female, possibly a prostitute and possibly a "mob hit", was found by Ranger Paul Larsen below Vista Point as a result of his observation of, what looked to be from above, a mannequin. Another corpse, described by Ranger Robyn Ishimatsu as a "body dump", was discovered in the creek below Vista Point before the start of her stewardship in 1995. She checked with retired Annadel State Park Ranger, Bill Krumbein, who added, "The Sherriff's Office came up and retrieved [that] body and did the investigation. I never viewed the body. It was dark when I got there. The bad guys, a woman and a man, shot this guy while he was asleep (presumably) in bed, then hauled the body, bed linens and all to Sugar Loaf and pitched him over the side at the overlook parking spot on the entrance road."

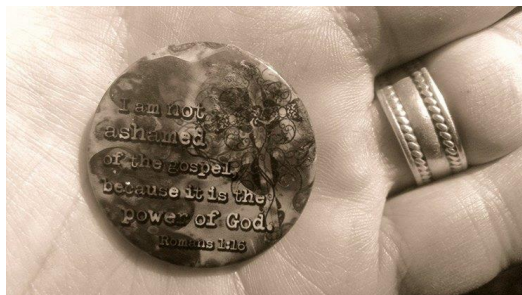
Source: E-Mails form Robyn Ishimatsu, November 19 and 29, 2014.

INCIDENT #6: DEATH IN AN EMERALD GLADE

It was a dark and stormy night in December 2002, when Senior State Archeologist E. Breck Parkman heard a knock on the door of his home in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. “It was pouring down rain and I thought, ‘who knocks on the door at 11:30 p.m.’? But I had to open it,” he said. Standing on the front deck were two State Park Rangers, Bob Berkland and Noel Wardell who had been dispatched to follow up on a call that had been made to the State Highway Patrol concerning a reported suicide in the park.

Breck had noticed two Highway Patrol cars leaving the park when he returned home earlier that evening, but had not given it much thought. The patrols had been following up on a note that was left in the home of a man who proclaimed that he was going to the “Ceremony Tree” in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park with the intention of performing an ancient Celtic suicide ritual, which involved stripping naked and then dying from exposure. The man’s car was found at the Goodspeed Trail parking lot, but no trace of the man himself was found by the patrolmen; so, State Parks was called to assist with their knowledge of the park trails and boundaries.

The two rangers at Breck Parkman’s door in that drenching rain were there to inquire about the whereabouts of that Ceremony Tree. Breck had not heard of such a tree and so Berkland took off in the park’s ATV and Wardell went on foot to search the trails. By 3:00 in the morning, with the man’s car still at the Goodspeed Trail lot, no trace of him was found. After daybreak a team of six rangers arrived to assist in the search and the body of a man of about 55 to 60 years of age eventually was found hanging from a tree limb behind the Big Leaf Maple tree (i.e. the so-called Ceremony Tree) located on the Headwaters Trail approximately 1/8 mile from the junction of the Headwaters and Vista trails. (Apparently, the comparatively mild weather conditions in the park were not conducive to a death by exposure.)



Several years later in 2013, Breck and his son were exploring the area where the suicide occurred and his son while climbing a tree discovered in the crook of some limbs a rusty pin (left) which displayed a Bible passage from Romans 1:16, which read, “I am not ashamed of the gospel as it is the power of God”. When had it been left and by whom? Was it left by the victim? Was it part of a Christian rite by family or friends intended to spiritually “cleansed” the area? Or was it just an unrelated discovery?

Hikers along the Headwaters Trail pass by the spot where the 2002 suicide occurred perhaps unaware of the drama that unfolded here not so many years ago. The area, thanks to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park volunteer Dave Chalk, now is respectfully marked on the park map with an asterisk but with no description. Hikers, including this author, cannot help but stop and look at

that spot in a natural water-collecting bowl with an ancient tree, spreading its limbs across a jumble of moss-covered rocks and looking very much like a verdant Irish glade.

Source: Interview of E. Breck Parkman, Senior State Archeologist, by Larry Maniscalco, Park Historian, October 28, 2014.

INCIDENT #7: HEART ATTACK ON A GROUP HIKE

The popular Bill and Dave Hikes have long attracted large numbers of ardent hikers. It was on one of their hikes in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park in 2001 – about a week after 9/11 -- that Dave Chalk in the lead received an urgent walkie-talkie alert from Bill Myers who was acting that day as sweep. The hike had just begun and had reached the amphitheater near the Creekside Nature Trail when Bill radioed, “Get back here, Dave, we have a problem.” One of the hikers, a man about 49 years of age from Windsor, was down and was turning blue. There were several of medically trained people on the hike including a nurse and a paramedic who provided emergency care while another person called 911. Within 15 minutes an ambulance arrived, but the man was by then “as blue as a pair of blue jeans,” said Dave. Resuscitative efforts failed and the body eventually was transported away. Some hike participants left at that point, but others stayed to finish the hike. (Bill Myers recalled that those who left were the ones who had invested most in trying to resuscitate the man.) “I was feeling bad wondering, what if anything could have done anything differently,” said Dave Chalk. “A couple of days later, the Ranger told me that he thought nothing could have been done to save the man.” Sometime later on a United Express flight from Santa Rosa to the San Francisco airport, Dave chanced upon a fellow passenger, a physician, who turned out to be the victim’s doctor. Apparently the man had been treated for diabetes and, according to the doctor, “It was his time to go and nothing more could have been done.”

Sources: Telephone interview with Dave Chalk, December 1, 2014. E-mail from Bill Myers, December 2, 2014

INCIDENT #8: A SUICIDE ON HILLSIDE TRAIL

Ranger Robyn Ishimatsu recalled that, “I was the one who responded to the probable suicide off of Hillside. I can’t recall any exact date but it happened within the last 10-12 yrs. or so [Ed. That would be in the time period from 2002-2004]. A couple of hikers who had gone off trail found the skeletal remains and reported it to me. The man had been missing for several months from another area in California. He had left a suicide note at his home.” [Ed. The note according to Breck Parkman read “Going to Sugarloaf to shoot myself” but there were no visible gun wounds nor was a weapon found. The police wrote it off as a suicide]. “The coroner’s office came and collected up the bones which were fairly intact inside of his clothing. There were no obvious signs of the cause of death,” said Robyn.

Sources: E-Mail from Robyn Ishimatsu, November 19, 2014. Interview of E. Breck Parkman, Senior State Archeologist, by Larry Maniscalco, Park Historian, October 28, 2014.

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