

HIPPIES IN THE PARK

Counter-Culture Activity in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park

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FOREWORD

The area of the present Sugarloaf Ridge State Park has a long history of human habitation. As far back as 7,000 years ago – and perhaps as long as 12,000 years ago – the area was populated by Native American tribal groups. Parties of Southern Pomo's were known to have used the park seasonally and ethnographers have identified the area as having been settled by members of the Wappo tribe.

The Wappo village of Wilicos, which was located near the headwaters of Sonoma Creek, gave its name to Rancho Los Guilicos. Los Guilicos, at 18,833 acres, was the seventh largest Mexican land grant in Sonoma County, stretching from Hood Mountain, across Oakmont and into Annadel State Park. It was awarded in 1837 to Scottish sea captain John (Juan) Wilson, the husband of Ramona Carillo (sister-in-law of General Mariano Vallejo), and was later sold to William Hood.

Beginning in 1862, congressional legislation opened the door to settlement by homesteaders on 160-acre parcels. The first such homestead was granted to John Bowen in 1867 just outside the park in the area of the present day Thatcher vineyard near Little Bald Mountain. According to the park's first Ranger, Milo Shepard, many of the subsequent Scots, Irish and German homesteaders ranched on the hillsides around Sugarloaf because most of the rich valley lands were in Mexican land grants and the remaining lowlands were too swampy to cultivate.

The most famous homesteading / ranching names in the park's history were those of W.D. Reynolds who purchased a 640-acre tract in 1907 and Ray and Bertha Hurd, who settled the 160-acre Hurd ranch in 1914. Remains of those holdings still exist today in Reynold's white barn and bunk house near the Robert Ferguson Observatory and the Hurd's red barn below the summit of Bald Mountain near Bear Creek.

In 1920, the Reynolds Ranch, now grown to 1,060 acres, was purchased by the Sonoma State Home in Eldridge (today called the Sonoma Developmental Center). The State Home had hoped to develop the main valley into a reservoir and water supply for the institution, but a 15-year water-rights battle between the State Home and downstream residents of Adobe Canyon blocked development of the reservoir and led to the eventual construction in another location of Lake Suttonfield which still today serves the water needs of the developmental center.

In 1931 the State Home established a Boy Scout and Campfire Girls camp for residents and children of the staff. It was named Camp Butler after Dr. Fred O. Butler who served as

Superintendent of the State Home from 1918 to 1948. The remains of the camp's cookhouse, parade ground and swimming are visible alongside an historic dirt road that is now Hillside Trail.

Camp Butler was closed in 1942 and never reopened after WWII. By 1959 the Reynolds Ranch was declared surplus property and, following efforts to make the property a state park, the Reynolds Ranch was transferred to the California Division of Beaches and Parks and designated as Sugarloaf Ridge State Park on June 18, 1964. The park was opened to the public on Memorial Day weekend in 1969.¹

HIPPIE HABITATION

The so-called hippie subculture began its development as a youth movement in the United States during the early 1960s and then developed around the world. Its origins can be traced to



European social movements in the 19th and early 20th century such as Bohemians, and the influence of Eastern religion and spirituality. According to Jim Shere, a psychotherapist and Executive Director of the Glen Ellen Historical Society, interest in Sonoma County can be traced to the Summer of Love in 1967, when the Flower Children who had flocked to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury District during the previous year began their exodus from the City in a great back-to-the-land

movement. "A hundred thousand of them had come to San Francisco, a mass migration not seen since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and the Argonauts of the Gold Rush a century before that."²

The actual date of the decline the "Hashbury" (as the Haight-Ashbury was called by Glen Ellen journalist Hunter S. Thompson) is hard to pin down. But 1967 seems to be as good a starting date as any. The deaths that year of Woody Guthrie, Alice B. Toklas and Otis Redding, the killing in Bolivia of Che Guevara, the initiation of the "Stop the Draft" movement, and the first U.S. air strike on Hanoi cast a wintry chill on the Summer of Love.³ According to Patrick Mc Murtry a long-time resident of Sonoma Valley, the Summer of Love was the golden window of the hippie movement that "got crusty", leading to an exodus of "psychedelic refugees" from the Haight-Ashbury to Sonoma County.⁴

Pat Mc Murtry told of a "gypsy" group of 10 or so persons from the Netherlands, France, Germany and Spain who were driving around the world in a renovated school bus around 1974-1975. The women were "stunningly beautiful", he recalled. They were among a fluid group living on Cavedale Road in a community of dropouts that was initiated by a man named Rainbow, an engineer who had "chucked it all" to make buttons. The European group eventually left to stay in the Sugarloaf campground because of the lack of a septic system in the Cavedale area.⁴

State Park docent and also a long-time Sonoma Valley resident, Jeff Falconer, recalled a hippie group that in 1967 converted an old vacuum cleaner store in Boyes Hot Springs to a “psychedelic shop”. The group, even though in their 30’s (remember the axiom, “Never trust anyone over 30”?) influenced the youth of the Sonoma Valley area by their open, attractive, sharing and let-it-all-hang out lifestyle. “They had no ideology, were intermittently monogamous and shared admirably,” he said. This group was known to have access to various houses and moved nomad-style from one to the other. The Boyes group was considered to be “pretty honest” and might even have rented the Hurd house in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park.⁴

Another hippie hangout was located in a rented house near the Chateau St. Jean winery and was used by the band H.P. Lovecraft, a gothic-folk rock group from Chicago that was the biggest name in the valley at that time. Members of the band would occasionally hike into Sugarloaf, according to Jeff Falconer who camped in the park for an entire month and who had occasional social contact with them. Jeff’s unusually long camping experience at that time was sanctioned by the park’s first Ranger Milo Shepard, perhaps because a section of the original graveled road to the park from Adobe Canyon had washed out after the park opened in 1969 and the only visitors were those who entered the park on foot.⁴



Jeff Falconer recalled a story that provides an interesting and human glimpse into Milo Shepard, the man who is best known as the grand-nephew of Jack London and the Shepard family’s unofficial promoter and protector of the London legacy: As Jeff tells it, a comely blond woman named Faith lived for a time in her VW Microbus down in Adobe Canyon, unable to drive up the washed out road into the park. Her frequent forays into Sugarloaf on foot caught the attention of the thrice-married Ranger. “Milo (*left*) was fascinated with her,” Jeff said and inquired with interest if she was ‘with anybody’.”⁴

(Note: This writer was curious about Milo Shepard’s hospitality and interest in the counter-cultural groups who meandered through the park, and later discovered that Milo had traveled to India with his second wife, Diane, to visit a popular holy man and avatar by the name of Sai Baba. As well, Milo traveled again to India four more times after that first visit. The account of his first visit has been recorded in a separate paper, “Milo in India”.)

Hippie habitation in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park mirrored the transient structure and flavor of 1960s intentional communities. Hippie activity in the park was loosely organized, with individual or small groups drifting from place to place to “hang out” in houses located in various places including San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Crooks Creek in Oregon in and Ojo Sarco in New Mexico. As well, hippie habitation in Sugarloaf never received the kind of notoriety or star quality as did Lou Gottlieb’s Morningstar Ranch in western Sonoma County or the Grateful Dead’s settlement at Olompali State Park in Marin County.⁴

Hippie habitation is known to have taken place at the Hurd Ranch after it had been sold and subsequently rented or leased, but the number of inhabitants is not known. According to

Christina Jones in a paper she prepared for the State Historian Frank Lortie, the ranch (renamed the Bear Creek Ranch) was purchased in 1964 by Santa Rosa attorney Everett Shapiro, acting for a group of investors who did not use the land. The house is known to have been rented to a group of “hippies”, but the number of inhabitants is not known. It was estimated that 30 persons regularly used the road to the house, but that number swelled to as many as 90 on the weekends.⁵

State Park volunteer Bill Myers related a conversation with Kenwood resident John Frediani who indicated that the old Hurd ranch was leased to his father, Larry Frediani, for use as a deer club until it was sold to the State in 1971. “We seldom used the old house because everyone wanted to camp outside,” said Frediani. “Hippies, yes they were around. Dad had them living all over the site. They had about four camps set up,” he said.⁶

A group was thought to be living at the Hurd house at the time that the house was burned (circa 1968). The Hurd House group included Nita and Weasel (last name withheld) and their child, along with a Don and a Rita and their children Michael and Girlie, and Jack the Human (as distinguished from his pet, Jack the Dog). Don, of Don and Rita, possessed an advanced academic degree, but chose to drop out and instead receive public assistance for the care of his children. Like *Bartleby the Scrivener* in the short story by Herman Melville, Don “preferred not to work” or, as he called it “weirk”.⁴ According to Senior State Archeologist E. Breck Parkman, John and Lydia (last name withheld) and their child can be added to the roster of Hurd house inhabitants.⁷

Breck Parkman (*right*) has investigated the area around the Hurd house ruins. “My archeological finds support a large residency during that time,” he said. His most recent findings during 2014 revealed several articles including a woman’s sandal, a leather belt with a brass buckle, colorful knit scarf and an article of underclothing with embroidered butterflies. “The hand-applied butterflies and other bright colors do remind me of Sixties “hippie” fashion,” Parkman said.⁷



Our narrative has reached a turning point from a discussion of hippy habitation to one of a shared Hippie-New Age phenomenon: the Harmonic Convergence. The following piece of Sugarloaf history is offered as bridge to that new chapter: From November 1-7, 1975 a large group of campers reserved 50 spaces in the Park campground. The group registered under the name of “Human Individual Metamorphosis”, a name that later would be changed to “Heaven’s Gate”. The Ranger’s Diary for the day indicated that, “They are an unidentified space ship cult. Good campers – causing NO problems.” The cult was gathering recruits during the fall of 1975 and their *modus operandi* was to camp their followers in remote campgrounds. State Park Archeologist, Breck Parkman related a reference that attributed the group’s performing secret rituals somewhere on Bald Mountain while in the park.⁸ The reader may recall that the group, led by Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Netters (often called “Bo” and “Peep” or “The Two”)

conducted in 1997 a mass suicide of 39 of the group's followers in order to reach what they believed was an alien space craft following Comet Hale-Bopp.

THE HARMONIC CONVERGENCE

The world-wide "Harmonic Convergence" during two days in 1987 drew numbers of people – hippies and others – to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. The Harmonic Convergence is the name that was given to the world's first globally synchronized meditation, which occurred on August 16–17, 1987, and which also closely coincided with an exceptional alignment of the planets Mercury, Venus and little Pluto, which had not yet been demoted to a dwarf planet. The convergence is purported to have corresponded with a great shift in the earth's energy from warlike to peaceful. Believers of this esoteric prophecy maintain that the Harmonic Convergence ushered in a five-year period of the Earth's "cleansing", during which time many of the planet's "false structures of separation" would collapse.⁹

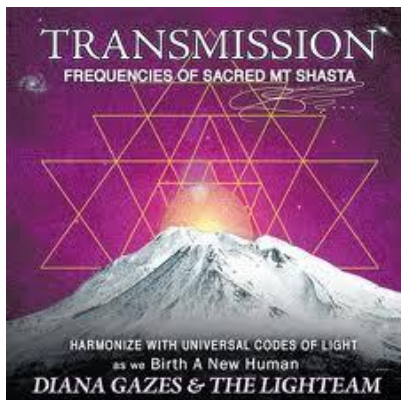
An important aspect of the Harmonic Convergence observance was the idea of congregating at



"power centers" such as Mount Shasta (*left*) and Mount Fuji (*right*), where the spiritual energy was thought to be particularly strong. The global event was popularized by Jose Arguelles, an art historian



who wrote "The Mayan Factor: The Path Beyond Technology". Arguelles believed that a minimum of 144,000 people would need to assemble at these power centers on Sunday, August 17 "to create a field of trust" and meditate for peace "to ground the vibrational frequencies" that would facilitate the arrival of a new era.¹⁰



According to news reports, there were as many as 6,000 participants on Mt. Shasta on Sunday, the main day of the Harmonic Convergence. "The roads up the mountain were clogged with RVs and buses, traditional camping areas were crowded with tent campers, and every trail had its share of day-pack hikers. It did seem to be somewhat of a populist phenomenon, for those present could not be so easily pegged as simply belonging to America's counter culture." Young and old were observed as well as rich and poor, hippie and yuppie, although most participants seemed to be New Age adherents. Recorders of the Shasta event met astrologers, channelers, and even some "Bible-thumping locals who drove up to convert the invading New Agers."¹¹

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park achieved the stature of a locally-designated power center, as did Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County, Santa Catalina Island and the Mt. Griffith Observatory in Los

Angeles. Rangers on duty during that period included Resident Unit Ranger Joe White and Rangers Shane Coles, Roy Flatt, Fred Lew, Paul Larsen, and Chris Stokes. Three other persons named Monroe, Long and Sharpe (their first names are not known) were also on duty and are thought to have been Rangers, as well. Several entries in the Sugarloaf Ridge State Park Ranger Log, as paraphrased below, provide an insight into preparations for the big event at the park:

Wednesday, August 13: A woman called from Santa Monica to say that she was coming up for the Harmonic Convergence and wanted to know if she could plug in a microphone anywhere in the park.

Thursday, August 14: This is the beginning of the Harmonic Convergence function. A lot of campers came up early and there were a tremendous amount of phone calls. Eight chemical toilets were dropped off for the function. "Humm-baby, it's gonna be fun!"

Friday, August 15: It was an operational nightmare due to lack of staff preparation, poor communication and lack of organization.¹²



On Saturday, August 16, an evening "purification ceremony" was held to kick off the Sugarloaf observance. Co-organizer, Gabriel Cousens (*left*), a psychiatrist, holistic physician, homeopath, Ayurvedic practitioner, Chinese herbalist, and diabetes researcher from Petaluma said that participants would burn off their negativity by symbolically imprinting it on leaves and throwing them into a campfire. "My anticipation," said Dr. Cousens, "is not that it's going to be a big cosmic boom as much as it's going to be an opening of the door for more positive energy coming into the planet."¹³

Throughout the afternoon of August 16, new arrivals to the park set up camp and prepared for activities to include on the following day a medicine wheel, a Native American healing exercise (*similar to the photo on the right*), as well as singing, chanting and dancing. Meanwhile the now-reinforced Sugarloaf Park Rangers worked assiduously behind the scenes to assure a calm, peaceful and well-ordered event:



August 16: "Excellent timing: The well is dry. The calamity of the Harmonic Convergence group continues." A three-year old girl fell off the ridge on Creekside Trail and sustained a deep gash on forehead requiring several stitches. Somebody shut off main valve from the spring as the box is not lockable. Water was recovering by the evening. \$1,032.55 in use fees were collected today. It's been busy and disorganized, but peaceful. Despite the paperwork bungle and the inability to straighten out the camp situation quickly, it was not that bad. The camp was for the most part pleasant and agreeable. We did not get the big hassles one usually expects with this large of a crowd. "Approximately 1,200 visitors were in park this day, including 1,000 for the Triple Harmonic Convergence event." (Note: The name Triple Harmonic

Convergence was used interchangeably with the shorter term “Harmonic Convergence” and referred to the aforementioned planetary conjunction of Mercury, Venus and Pluto.)¹²

Diane Besida, who from 1982 to 2008 served as an assistant caretaker of the Stern Ranch, participated in the Sunday Harmonic Convergence ceremony at Sugarloaf. She recalled that co-organizer Gabriel Cousens was the founder of the Tree of Life Rejuvenation Center, which at the time was located in Petaluma and now is centered in Patagonia, Arizona. As Diane described it, the Sunday observance began in the camping area: “It was incredibly hot that day. We hiked to an open meadow where the ground had been prepared like a medicine wheel. We walked the wheel independently entering from the east, crossing to the west, then south, then north, then to the center. Whenever someone felt like hiking up to the clearing where the wheel was laid out, they did.” At the end of the day following a separate group ceremony, participants were able to select and keep a crystal.¹⁴

By most accounts the Harmonic Convergence observances at Sugarloaf were concluded successfully and the Ranger Log for August 17 noted that the last of the participants were “filtering out” and that Ranger Joe White had been given a small polished marble slab with “Peace” written in Japanese from the officials of the Triple Harmonic Convergence group.¹²

AFTERWORD

Over the years, the area that is now Sugarloaf Ridge State Park has lured homesteaders and hunters, hippies and hikers. What attracted these diverse groups? The short answer would be the beauty and the bounty of the land. For the homesteaders, perhaps it was the promise of “free” land and the opportunity to eke out a living from the fruits of the earth. For hunters perhaps it was the acting out of an ancient instinct and a chance to observe animals without being observed. For hikers it was and continues to be the peacefulness of open space along with a mobile challenge and the reward of breathtaking views. And for hippies, well, Jeff Falconer captured what many during that era might have felt: “There was a wave of deep, familiar experience running through the participants in that brief-yet-vivid societal experiment. Those of us who got a taste of that wave in the “New Park above Kenwood” will never forget the wonder and splendor of that special place at that special time.”¹⁵

SOURCES

¹ Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, “Timeline”, Version 5, May 22, 2014.

² Kenwood Press, “Those were the days”, Jim Shere, November 1, 2013.

³ www.hippy.com, “Hippy Timeline”.

⁴ In-person interviews with Jeff Falconer conducted on May 23, 2014 and with Jeff Falconer and Patrick McMurtry conducted on May 30, 2014.

⁵ “Sugarloaf Ridge State Park (An Historic Sketch)”, Christina Jones, Cultural Heritage Section, California Department of Parks and Recreation, April 1977.

⁶ Email to the author from Bill Myers, September 10, 2014.

⁷ Email to the author from E. Breck Parkman, September 29, 2014.

⁸ Email to the author from E. Breck Parkman, September 26, 2014.

⁹ www.Wikipedia, “Harmonic Convergence”.

¹⁰ Press Democrat, “Harmonic convergers greet new era”, August 17, 1987.

¹¹ www.siskiyous.edu, “Harmonic Convergence”.

¹² Sugarloaf Ridge State Park Ranger Log for the period August 13-17, 1987.

¹³ Press Democrat, “Cosmic believers converge at Sugarloaf”, by Chris Smith, August 16, 1987.

¹⁴ Telephone interview with Diane Besida conducted on June 29, 2014.

¹⁵ Email to the author from Jeff Falconer, September 26, 2014.

PHOTOS

Page 2: The Haight-Ashbury, Flickr.com.

Page 3: Milo Shepard, Sugarloaf Ridge State Park archives.

Page 4: Breck Parkman at the Hurd House ruins, photo by the author.

Page 5: Mt. Shasta, Flickr.com.

Page 5: Mt. Fuji and Lake Kawaguchi , photopedia.com

Page 5: Mt. Shasta Harmonic Convergence event, lightbeam.com.

Page 6: Dr. Gabriel Cousens, Google Images.

Page 6: Native American Medicine Wheel, Google Images.