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Sea Ranch

OCEANIC PROPERTIES

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Report

INVESTIGATION OF RESIDENTS AND THEIR OPINIONS
AND REACTIONS TO THE WEATHER
IN AREA OF SEA RANCH, SONOMA COUNTY

Author
Project No.
Date of Report
Number of Copies of Report
Notes

FOOTE, CONE & BELDING

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San Francisco
September, 1963

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OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this investigation was to:

- 1) supplement objective weather information by seeking opinions and descriptions of weather from residents of the Sea Ranch area.

- 2) obtain indications of the residents reactions to the weather, and background information on their activities and opinions regarding the area generally.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on informally conducted interviews, the weather in the area now called Sea Ranch is generally regarded by people in the area as follows:

Heavy winter rains, interspersed with some clear, cool days

A delightful spring of diminishing rain and increasing sunshine

A foggy summer, with the heavy three or four day fogs broken by partly sunny but windy days

A comfortable fall of warm clear days.

The appreciation of the weather in the area is relative. While it is felt to be too foggy and too windy, it is this cool climate that is preferred by most of the residents. Most of them have moved to the area within at least 10 years and many within 5 years.

There are two classes of people in the area. One a supervisory-merchant class that is interested in developing the area; the other, the loggers and mill workers whose interests are quite short range, and whose stay in the area is generally limited.

The recent experience of this area has been a shift from a country socially dominated by the working (loggers-mill workers) class to one dominated by the middle (merchant-supervisory) class: a shift from an isolated logging area to a small urban area. With this shift, the area becomes more independent of the weather except as it attracts more people from other areas.

The area seems to be one of high expectation. The people feel recent events are the beginning of a period of growth and improvement of the area and of their personal situations. There is even a feeling the weather is better than it used to be.

The attraction of the area to most was not primarily economic. The attractions are the chance to be close to outdoor activities and other outdoor-oriented people, the scenic beauty, the climate and the quiet of the area.

Economically, lumber remains the most important element. It is, however, diminishing. Supplementing it somewhat are tourism, (including hunters, fishermen, Abalone hunters) and land development.

The existence of a "Banana Belt" is doubtful. The area is probably somewhat better in climate than the areas north and south, but not to any great degree. A warm, wind-free zone seems to be primarily an impression some local Chamber of Commerce members try to convey.

FINDINGS

Based on informal interviews with men and women in the Sea Ranch area during August and September, 1963.

Weather

In the course of informal conversations, respondents were asked for a description of the general weather conditions in the area. There were slight differences in descriptions and on the part of some there was considerable difficulty. What, of course, is lacking almost entirely is detail -- information that can be determined only by measurement and regular observation.

In general, the yearly weather cycle was described as follows. Beginning in October or November are the rains. They continue throughout the winter predominating over some sunny days which are also cool and crisp.

In March or April the spring weather begins. There is a slight carry-over of rain but the rains are considerably lighter than the heavy winter rains. Most of the spring days are clear and balmy. The spring is considered by the residents as one of the best times of the year.

Sometime in June the heavy fog begins. These fogs often last without break for 3 or 4 days. There are some clear summer days. These are usually accompanied by a morning fog and evening fog. The morning fog is burned off generally before 10:00 AM and returns in the evening as the sun sets.

About August 15, fall begins. This weather is typically clear and sunny, with some wind. Along with spring it is looked on as one of the best times of the year.

There are exceptions to all these general seasonal descriptions. This year particularly seems to have been out of the pattern. The summer was not as foggy as usual and the much anticipated fall weather was late in starting.

The weather conditions that seem to dominate in the residents' minds are fog and wind. There is a somewhat pessimistic feeling expressed by many that when there is no fog there is wind, and the only relief from fog is wind. Rain while hampering activity is not viewed as bleakly as are these two conditions which to some degree are present most of the year. Days when the sun shines and there is no fog or no wind are greeted joyously.

In the Gualala/Sea Ranch area there seems to be a fog belt extending about 3/4 to one mile in from the coast. This is especially true of the summer fogs. Frequently, patches of blue sky can be seen as the fog runs up to the top of the ridge line and stops. On the other side of the fog line the weather is usually quite hot in the summer.

The fog itself is generally a high fog. At night it comes down somewhat and moves inland.

The stretch of highway through the Sea Ranch is not viewed as a particularly bad one. The fog along it is generally high. The bad stretches of highway are where it is high and close to the ocean. The Jenner grade is thought to be particularly bad. There seems to be a slight difference in weather above and below the Annapolis Road. It is possibly a little better north of the road but primarily it is just slightly different due to wind conditions. That is, it may be foggy around Stewart's Point and clear near Gualala, or vice versa.

Among those who have lived in the area for sometime there is a feeling that the weather is better now than it used to be. They seem to feel there is less rain and fog and the fog now is higher and less dense than it used to be. Part of this feeling could be based on real changes and part on improved living conditions. Residents have better insulated homes, better heating, more diversions that can make them think the weather is less bad.

"Banana Belt"

A special effort was made in each conversation to try to determine the existence of a "Banana Belt". (This is a term used to describe an area somewhere between Ft. Ross and Pt. Arena that has substantially better weather than the areas to the north and south.) There was not any clear evidence that such a belt exists, at least not to the degree often described. The term itself is said to have been coined by a real estate agent to promote the area as being less cool and foggy than the Sonoma and Mendocino coasts are generally thought to be. At its most exaggerated, the Banana Belt runs from about Iverson's Landing to Stewart's Point, and in the words of one merchant, "There is no fog here. It is clear over 90% of the time."

The more considered judgments are that weather conditions in this area may be slightly better than the surrounding area but they are not distinctly improved. There is certainty that the Anchor Bay/Gualala/Sea Ranch weather is better than Pt. Arena and probably somewhat better than Ft. Ross. However, it is generally typical of the Sonoma/Mendocino coast weather and certainly should not be thought of as clear and warm. Rather than a broad area of better weather, residents are aware of small areas that due to wind protection enjoy better weather than nearby places at certain times of the year.

The residents

Sometime within the past 10 to 12 years the general character of the people in this area has undergone a change. This change has been due to two trends. One is the decline in logging, the other is an increase in the living standard.

Ten years ago there was a logging boom. There were 12 mills where there are now 2. Housing and living conditions were rudimentary and most of the population worked directly on lumber--either logging or in the mills. Most of the people had low educational levels, were semi-itinerant and had little desire to improve their situation or locale. Single men predominated.

While still the most important source of revenue for the area, logging has declined and attracted a more stable type of person. There are fewer single men and the length of stay of such persons has lengthened.

During this time a middle class has grown in the area. At first this was primarily supervisory logging personnel. The area then attracted more merchants as people desired better services and goods. The introduction of telephones, electricity and with them communication with the outside attracted people who otherwise would not have come.

This middle class dominates and now gives its character to the area. This character remains outdoors oriented but is stable and striving. They plan on remaining in the area and hope to improve the area and thereby their own situation. Very few of them have been in the area more than 7 or 8 years. They came to the area from such places as Sebastopol, Palo Alto, Modesto and differ from their former neighbors primarily in their liking of the outdoors.

Moving to Gualala was not a withdrawal for them. Most of them moved into jobs with a similar status to the ones they left. They moved for the hunting, fishing and the quiet. Also, they moved with some expectation that they were getting in on the beginning of the development of the area. They all have fairly high expectations. To some extent their expectations are being realized with a growth in semi-retired or retired persons living in the area and a growth of interest in the area by tourists, and lately the Segerstrom and Oceanic interests in the area.

They did not come to the area for isolation. The lessening of the isolation encouraged the sometime visitors to remain there. What they seem to seek is quiet. It is a word frequently used to describe why they like the area or what attraction they feel the area has. While

striving, they generally do not have aggressive personalities and are to varying degrees quiet themselves. The muffling effect of the fog likely adds to their appreciation of the quiet. While they hunt and fish, it is characteristic the more contemplative fishing attracts most of their interest.

There are few real natives. Most people can readily name those who have lived there all their lives. Some have been assimilated with the new middle class. Others remain somewhat aloof and antagonistic. They resent the intrusion of outsiders and the success many of the newcomers have had. However, they tolerate the new in the expectation of financial gain through land appreciation.

The area tends to remain a man's world no matter what the occupation. Almost without exception when they move to the area women hate it and for almost a year are unhappy. They feel isolated. The nearest doctor and dentist is Pt. Arena and used to be Ft. Bragg. The closest movie is in Pt. Arena and is open only Wednesdays and weekends. At first there seems little to do. Gradually they develop friendships and are able to engage in social activities similar to those they have left. Television fills the entertainment gap for many.

Most wives, if they are able, work. Even the middle class is by no means affluent, and too much leisure time can cause boredom.

Part of the women's acceptance of the area is due to their children. There is a strong feeling that this is a good place to raise children. They feel the atmosphere is honest (except for the occasional shoplifting tourist) and healthy. Teenagers have a slightly different view. While they enjoy the outdoor activities there are too few of their own kind for them to really enjoy the area.

The middle or supervisory-merchant class and working class tend to remain separate. This is evidenced by the trade at the two stores and the two bars in Gualala. Even in such a small area their different motivations and behavior tend to make their social differences distinct. There is some overlapping, of course, and the general interest in the fishing, etc. does provide common ground. As the working class becomes more stable in the area, their interests in schools and community activities brings them closer to the middle class. The common motivations and interests created by television also bring them closer. For the most part the working class has little interest in such happenings as the sale of the Ohlson property. This is more true of the loggers than of the mill workers who are more likely to become permanent residents.

Influence of weather on residents

Most of the residents of the area are in occupations that are not necessarily strongly influenced by the weather. Those occupations that take them outdoors are primarily off the coast far enough to have substantially less fog and wind. Rain is the element that most influences the ranchers and loggers. The loggers stop work only for the winter rains. The ranchers are more controlled by the biological cycle of sheep than the weather.

The mills stockpile logs and are not seasonal. The merchants are not affected except in the number of tourists that may come at the different seasons. The winter with its steelhead fishing attracts visitors, as does the scenic coastline in the summer and, those without children in the spring and fall.

The economy no longer stops in the winter. There is some slackening due to the loggers drawing unemployment rather than wages and there being fewer fishermen than tourists.

There is some emotional influence of the weather, but generally the people are of a nature to accept and enjoy it. Most of them came from other types of climates and moved to this one because they like it. They might like less fog and somewhat warmer weather but are generally satisfied with the weather. In the summer substantially warmer weather is literally just over the hill. But, except for children swimming, it holds little attraction for those along the coast. They prefer the cool and the quiet.

METHOD

In the months of August and September personnel of Foote, Cone and Belding interviewed people in the area of Gualala and Sea Ranch. There was a total of three days of interviewing. The interviews took the form of informal conversations. The conversations were guided to cover certain specific topics: the weather and the relationship, if any, of the weather to the person speaking. Approximately 20 persons were interviewed. About 5 were women.

Occupations of some of the respondents were sheep rancher, truck driver, motel manager, mill superintendent, property manager, secretary, gas station attendant, grocery store owner, real estate agent, logger, mill worker, waitress. Most respondents were interviewed at their place of work: the two Gualala stores, Stewart's Point store, Gualala Lumber, Gualala Redwood Association, G & R Lumber, Surf Motel, Gualala Hotel, Standard Station, etc.