

Japanese 'come home' to Pebble Beach



Pat Hathaway collection/Monterey

The original lodge at Pebble Beach.



Pat Hathaway collection/Monterey

Strict restrictions faced visitors to Pebble Beach, once the area went into private control.

Musings on prime area and its early history

WHEN THE CNN microphones pulled back out of the frame and the furor over Minoru Isutani's purchase of Pebble Beach slid back to the editorial pages, I took a stroll around Pebble Beach to see what all the fuss is about.

Paying the required \$5.75 at the Seventeen-Mile drive gate, I joined an impatient parade of cars following the convoluted drive through the pine forest, past Shepherd's Knoll, Spanish Bay, and the mansions staring with studied detachment at the most glorious seascape in all the world. (Maybe that's the ultimate arrogance of wealth — taking for granted a view which the rest of us will pay \$5.75 to see.)

As I watched the couple in the car in front of me, I wondered if they knew that the shepherds honored at that turn-out back there were not shepherds out of a Nativity scene — they were Chinese shepherds.

● Or that a Chinese shepherd named Joe lived at Point Joe.

● Or that the Charles Crocker who is honored in the cypress grove made his fortune on the backs of Chinese railroad workers who defied gravity and built the

Hindsight



Sandy Lydon

ish. All of the people in the brochure's beautiful photographs are white. There are no clues in this 1989 publication that Pebble Beach is tucked into the midst of a multi-racial, Pacific Rim state.

Then it clicked. *Of course* (my emphasis). The gates, the Spanish style houses, the references to European gentility — they moved Pebble Beach to the Mediterranean. The entire place is an attempt to create a preserve a European ambience. Rewrite the history and then put up gates to preserve the mood. The



who is honored in the cypress grove made his fortune on the backs of Chinese railroad workers who defied gravity and death to build his railroad through the Sierra.

● Or that there was a Chinese fishing village just beyond the fourth tee of the Pebble Beach golf course.

● Or that just over there, beside the 17th green, lived a Chinese fisherman named Jung San Choy who raised a family of 13 children on that spot.

● Or that Japanese abalone divers worked over at Point Lobos for a half-century.

● Or that the ocean glistening there is the same ocean that washes the shores of the Philippines, China, and Minoru Isutani's Japan.

No. There's no way any of the people in the cars with their varied license plates would know that Pebble Beach, Carmel Bay, the Del Monte Forest and Point Lobos have a deep and rich Pacific history.

Unfortunately, that gap in their knowledge makes them perfect CNN interview fodder.

"Excuse me, what do you think about the fact that Pebble Beach was bought by a *Japanese*?" (their emphasis)

"Really? Where do *they* (their emphasis) get off buying everything in America?" Grumble. Grumble.

So I walked down to the spung-sugar sand beach at Stillwater Cove (God bless the Coastal Commission for preserving public access!), sat down on a log and tried to think through this Pebble Beach conundrum. I leafed through the brochure which I was given at the gate and noted that there are no references to Chinese or Japanese, and that all historic references to things Mexican have become Span-

pean abundance. Rewrite the history and then put up gates to preserve the mood. The loudly understated elegance. The hush broken only by the whine of electric carts. History? Sure, there's a plaque honoring Bing Crosby at the Del Monte Lodge.

I wanted to rush onto the 17th green, grab the guy with the plaid pants and shout at him: "Don't you see? You're standing on Chinese history. Japanese history." I wanted to tell him about Jung San Choy, the Chinese fisherman whose descendants gathered at the Beach Club several years ago to toast his honor. Or Gennosuke Kodani, the Japanese abalone diver who lived across Carmel Bay at Point Lobos and pioneered a fishing industry that spread all along the North American coast. But I didn't, because I knew it was too complicated. Why should he care? He paid \$175 to play golf, not to hear a history lecture.

So, between foursomes (\$700 worth of golfer on the hoof), I sneaked across the 18th fairway and climbed down the rip-rap to see if I could find the actual pebbles of Pebble Beach. The pebble beach is still there, albeit very small and hidden beneath the dolomite boulders and concrete blocks thrown there to stop the Pacific.

As I rolled some of the pebbles in my palm, I saw a flash of green. And another. Shards of pottery from the time of Jung San Choy? Maybe. Maybe not. No matter. Jung San Choy is a part of the history, even if he didn't make the brochure.

By purchasing Pebble Beach, Minoru Isutani has done what no history book could — he reached through the rip-rap, the gates, and the pages of the inane brochure and jerked Pebble Beach back to the Pacific Rim. He bought the gates through which earlier Japanese immigrants could not pass. He bought the drive originally built by Chinese laborers. He bought the entire golf course,



Monterey Public Library

Jung San Choy and family at Pebble Beach, 1890.

which contains the club with no minority members. (Ironically, even if nothing changes, with the coming switch in California's population, all those non-Asian members automatically will become minority.) He bought the most exclusive spot on the North American coast and taught us all a lesson in geography — that's the Pacific Ocean out there. Always has been.

I walked through the lobby of the Del Monte and smiled when I thought about how all of the folks there were being whirled by unseen economic and historical currents that just realigned the very spot upon which they stood. I stifled the urge to tell them.

While driving out the gate, I saw the foreign sedans zipping into Pebble Beach in their members-on-

ly lane. The guard smiled and waved at each car that bore the little Del Monte Forest shield on its grill. Isutani won't have to show no badges. He owns the place.

One last historical note: Charles Crocker imported so many Chinese laborers into California that by 1867 they were known as "Crocker's pets."

Ah, the ebb and flow of Pacific tides.

Thanks for the lesson in history and geography, Isutani-san. And welcome to Pebble Beach.

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