

PROPOSAL FOR THE

ESTABLISHMENT OF

CHINA CAMP SHORELINE PARK

(A BAY AREA DAYTIME PARK)

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GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

The proposed China Camp Shoreline Park is located on the tip of the San Pedro peninsula in east Marin contiguous to the City of San Rafael.

This land is bounded on the south by McNear's Beach, a Marin County park, and on the west by Harry Barbier Park belonging to the City of San Rafael.

The proposed park is composed for the most part of the property owned by New York-California Corporation, a tract of approximately 1,400 acres.

While in the proposed park area, one is struck by the remoteness from the nearby urban areas of San Rafael.

The tree-covered hills effectively shield the proposed park area from the visual encroachment of development, yet the area is easily accessible to the burban areas of Marin and San Francisco. Representative travel times: 20 minutes from the Presidio, 45 minutes from Candlestick Park, 40 minutes from Daly City, 15 minutes from Richmond, 30 minutes from Berkeley and 40 minutes from Oakland.

Looking to the east, San Pablo Bay stretches for miles to Point Pinole on the opposite shore presenting to the visitor the same pristine vista that was enjoyed by the Miwok Indians long before the establishment of Spanish California.

The shoreline is composed of sandy beach, marshes and shallow estuaries extending for approximately 5 miles. This

shoreline is one of the last viable pieces of natural shoreline unassaulted by "improvements" in the entire San Francisco Bay.

Should this property be acquired by the public as a park, a hiker could start from the shore of San Pablo Bay at China Camp and walk up over the hills all the way to Highway 101 in central San Rafael. This hike would not cross a single road except San Pedro road which presently crosses the proposed park near the Bay. Such a walk is possible because of the interconnection of this tract with other existing public property such as Harry Barbier Park.

Up from the bayshore at China Camp the proposed park contains gentle hills covered with native oaks with wide vistas of open pasture abundantly spread out in the valleys and canyons. The hills rise to a point about 1,000 feet above the Bay and afford a rare scenic vista of Point Pinole, Richmond, Oakland and parts of San Francisco. Mt. Tamalpais and the hills of west Marin are also seen when looking west from this point.

## II

### CURRENT NEED FOR ADDITIONAL OPEN SPACE

Marin County is rich in open space. The vast reaches of west Marin and the Golden Gate National Seashore are both welcome results of governmental foresight in planning. These areas are not intended for the exclusive enjoyment of the people of Marin, but serve as a nearby retreat for the people of the entire Bay Area.

A simplistic theme seems to have developed in Marin governmental planning in that the area west of Highway 101 seems to be primarily considered for open space recreational land and the area east of Highway 101 being written off and abandoned to concentrated residential and commercial development.

The nature of the west Marin park lands seems as a practical matter to limit use to overnight and weekend excursions. These kinds of substantial outings almost demand the use of private automobiles to take advantage of the area. Bus service to points in west Marin is spotty and although it may be improved, it will be costly. Several hours transportation are required for Bay Area residents to get to west Marin recreational areas, as a result daily use is extremely limited.

The great bulk of Marin's population is concentrated along the dense urban corridor surrounding Highway 101.

During the summer of 1973 the two small parks serving east Marin for daytime use were loaded daily beyond capacity.

Perhaps the people in the urban areas prefer the warm sunshine and the smooth bay of east Marin over the foggy and cold ocean front of west Marin. The true facts seem to point to the conclusion that the small parks in east Marin are easy to get to and are very attractive and lend themselves to daily daytime use.

The proposed China Camp Shoreline Park is adjacent to one of the small county parks called McNear's Beach. The Marin County paper, The Independent Journal, wrote several articles this summer concerning the heavy use of these parks. The present attractiveness of McNear's Beach precludes the extension of nearby Golden Gate Transit service to the park. As simple as extending this service would be, the only existing control of park use is the limitations of the parking area. Even with limited parking, McNear's Beach frequently has crowds of 2,500 people per day. The design capacity of the park is only 1,500 and the park is only in the second year of operation. Paradise Park in Tiburon, the only other east Marin County park, also shares the same crippling popularity. Needless to say, the facilities in west Marin are popular, but the west Marin region seems to enjoy visitors numbered in a much more reasonable proportion to the facilities and area available, than east Marin.

There is a desperate need for more quality open space land suitable for daytime recreation use in urban east Marin. The proposed China Camp Shoreline Park would meet this need.

With the advent of the Golden Gate Transit system, the area is within reasonable reach by travel time, expense and

daytime convenience to the vast majority of the urban population of the Bay Area. Most of the Bay Area population can reach the proposed park area in less than one hour.

Expansion of parks in east Marin is absolutely necessary. Establishment of China Camp Shoreline Park would amply meet this need and preserve this rich, historic spot in perpetuity.

### III

#### HISTORY

##### Indian Background

Originally the area of the San Pedro peninsula known as "China Camp" was the home of the Miwok's, a band of coastal indians. The indians lived on acorns from the trees and the fish and crustaceans freely available from the rich fertile Bay. Evidence of the indians sojourn in the area is attested to by mounds of clam and mussel shells which must have taken centuries to accumulate.

##### First Chinese

The cause of the eventual demise of the Miwok's is unknown to this writer but the area took on its present name during the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad starting in 1861 by the Big Four; Stanford, Hopkins, Huntington and Crocker.

In the east, confederate prisoners worked on the railroad. In the west, a short supply of labor to extend the railroad over the high Sierra caused the railroad to import Chinese labor from Canton. The numbers required caused many a ship's master to bypass, in the quiet of the night, the legal port of entry at Alcatraz to deposit their human cargo behind the lee side of Point San Pablo. This became known as China Camp and became a demarcation point for the railroad labor camps in the



Sierra for a number of years.

### Second Chinese

When the Central Pacific was completed in the late 1860's, the Chinese laborers returned to San Francisco. Many Chinese remained in the Sierra working the mines of the comstock lode. Most Chinese, however, flocked to San Francisco to work making shoes, cigars, coveralls and some as cooks in fine San Francisco restaurants.

During the early 1870's a mile square shrimp bed was discovered off China Camp. Shrimp factories manned by Chinese in junks mushroomed along the Shore of San Pablo Bay from McNear's Beach to Santa Venetia. During the depression of 1877 and at the close of the comstock mines, San Francisco teemed with unemployed men. Dennis Kearney, as a populist leader, preached that cheap coolie labor had ruined the chance of Americans to make a living wage. In the face of this strong prejudice, many Chinese moved away from San Francisco. By the mid 1880's, fully 10,000 Chinese lived in Marin County, mostly in the China Camp area.

In 1910, the State seeded San Pablo Bay with sea bass. The shrimping interfered with the fish and the State brought pressure to bear which resulted in the end of Chinese shrimping in the area.

### Third Chinese Influence

In 1924, the sole remaining Chinaman at China Camp,

Quan Hock Quock, discovered a way to obtain the shrimp without disturbing the fish. For a long time the China Camp fisheries thrived, but by 1954 the shrimp harvest had dwindled to nothing due to mud covering the beds. Soon afterwards the land was sold to the Marin Bay Development Company who developed the subdivision, Peacock Gap. The New York-California Industrial Corporation, the owner of Marin Bay, retains under single ownership the remainder of the land.

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SEE:

Death of China Camp, San Francisco Magazine, October 1962. A Park for East Marin, Pacific Sun, December 23, 1970. Independent Journal, July 12, 1973 and October 11, 1969. History of Marin County, 1888.