

Discovery Harbour – A Piece of the South Point Story

Introduction and Acknowledgments

Dear Folks,

March 2012

I am the mother of Cort Gariepy, one of the new owners of the golf course. Knowing that I like history and research, he asked if I would dig into a little background of Discovery Harbour while my husband Gerry and I spent several weeks here this winter.

*It's been an enjoyable project for us, and we've met some delightful people as we've "talked story" and explored the history. **Thank you to ...***

***the Planning Board staff** where we spent three days delving through records in Hilo.*

***Sonny and Getta Ramos.** They took us on extensive walks through ancient Hawaiian places and shared wonderful stories about their culture and how they incorporate some of the old traditions into modern-day life.*

***Joe Klecak and Bill Gundaker** for sharing their long-term residency experiences. Both of these men have worked hard for Discovery Harbour. Joe is one of the residents who presently mows two fairways.*

***Harry Hayselden and Nelson Young** for telling about their roles in maintaining the golf course since the 1970's.*

***Vernon Evangelista.** He's a golf course specialist and explained his professional role at Discovery Harbour.*

***Clara Lemmens** for telling the important HOA segment of the history. She served as HOA secretary for many years.*

***Dave Malec,** one of the present owners, who did title research on the property.*

***Gary and Linda McMickle.** They are also owners and have gathered a wealth of information as they are endeavoring to "rediscover" Discovery Harbour. Your research has been a great help.*

***Peter Anderson** for contributing the photographs.*

***Doug Castro** for technology and artistic layout.*

***Betty Northup.** She loaned me the stacks of information she's so carefully filed through the years. Also, she opened her home as a gathering place for people to be interviewed. In the end, I used her computer to record the results. She's been a part of this research and so much wants to see Discovery Harbour flourish ... just as her*

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husband did when he was here. She's been a delight to work with.



Left to right: Nelson Young, Harry Hayselden, Betty Northup and Sonny Ramos

Cort, this report is a brief summary as our time here has been short. Dad and I certainly have come to understand your love and enchantment with the area.

Carole Gariepy

Discovery Harbour ... a good name, a name of historic significance. It's located in Waiohinu, near the southernmost point in the United States where the Polynesians discovered Hawaii.

Historians have found historic evidence of settlement at South Point dating to around the year 100 A.D. A stonewall encompasses the area where the first settlers established a small village; the location is preserved on the National Historic Register. Nearby are



several important archeological sites from that time: a fishing heiau, burial place, mooring stones, salt pan, and a Palahemo. The walled fishing heiau is where fishermen left a fish offering to express their thanks for a successful catch. The burial place is respected as are all cemetery plots. Mooring stones are



pounded through huge rocks; they are amazing to see and to learn how early Hawaiians tied long ropes from their boats to these stones to safely anchor and be able to use both



hands while fishing offshore. The salt pan is a flat hollowed-out stone where sea water could evaporate and salt be collected. Palahemo is a huge fresh water hole, quite close to the sea, a very unique site and something essential to support a village. It is said, "No one has been to South Point if they haven't been to Palahemo." Sonny Ramos told the story that has been passed down through the generations about early settlers discouraging European voyagers from

stopping there for water by having their children jump and play in the water hole. The heavier salt water is on the bottom and the water floating on the top is fresh. Children jumping and playing in it would rile it up and make the water undrinkable. Later, after it settled, the salt water sank and the fresh water was once again on the surface and ready for use. Today, people go there to rinse off the salt after swimming in the ocean.



South Point was an excellent location for fishing. Some Polynesians stayed and established their lives there, but like many adventurers, others moved about to further explore and settle the island. Some went to Waipio Valley which was, and still is, a favorable place to

grow taro, a staple of the Hawaiian diet.

Individuals did not own property. Land was owned by area chiefs and later the king. People just built their homes where they wanted to live, and they worked and shared together as a community. They were caretakers of the land. (Interestingly, Hawaii's King Kamehameha I lived nearby in the small seaside village of Waiahukini during his teenage years; Waiahukini, located in the southern part of the town that is now Ocean View was buried by a lava flow.)



European explorers and whalers stopped in the Ka'u area to resupply their ships with food and fresh water. Unfortunately, their stops caused great distress to the Hawaiians who had low resistance to foreign diseases. One epidemic brought by Europeans caused a 50% loss of population in 1804. Very likely, this is why their stops were discouraged.

In 1848, King Kamehameha III changed the rules and allowed people to possess their own property. At first, he gave parcels to good friends, both Hawaiians and foreigners. Among the first foreigners to take advantage of this opportunity were the sugar planters who came and established huge plantations; the first one in the Ka'u area was developed in 1866.

Hawaiians were accustomed to a free-style, subsistence type of living which was easy where vegetables, fruit, and fish were in such abundance; they did not like the regulated work of the plantations, so owners found it necessary to import laborers. They brought workers from China, Portugal, Japan, and the Philippines. The Hawaiian plantations were soon the top sugar producers in the world. This industry brought about a population change to the islands; the population became mixed as the Hawaiians and the immigrants intermarried. The cultures blended happily, no discrimination obstacles that many other parts of the United States have faced.

The town of Waiohinu, where Discovery Harbour is



located, was a thriving community, the main town in the Ka'u district where the county seat was located until the earthquake that accompanied Mauna Loa's eruption in 1868 destroyed most of the buildings in the village. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) had been an overnight visitor there in 1866 and was charmed by the exotic beauty of the mountains, ocean, flowers, and lava formations. He planted a monkey pod tree on the main street to commemorate his visit; the tree today with the "Mark Twain" plaque is a descendant of the original tree. The first name of Discovery Harbour was "Mark Twain Estates" after his illustrious visit.

R.F. Sweet and Associates, a California real estate company, bought 540 acres of ranch land from Judge Walter Hayselden in 1960, enough land for 798 house lots, a 160-acre golf course, and 29.69 acres for commercial use. It is not clear in 1963 if new people from California managed the development or just changed the company name, but ownership was then listed under Green Sands Corporation. The development was still called Mark Twain Estates.

It takes a lot of planning to convert open ranch land with no county services into a golfing community. Mark Twain Estates would need paved and graded roads, drainage provisions, an adequate water supply, fire hydrants, electric and telephone lines, and plans to preserve any historic sites. The Planning Board, Traffic Commission, and Board of Health were all involved in the planning process, a process that was lengthy and thorough. To honor the heritage of the area, all roads were given Hawaiian names: Makoa – fearless, brave, Kaulua – double hull canoe, Lewalani – upper space where the clouds float.

A lot of ground work was accomplished toward forming the community and some building lots were sold, but no homes or a golf course were completed. The process had been a financial struggle. Records show the company was sometimes delinquent in taxes and had poor communication with the Boards. In 1969, the development was sold to another California company, Cal-Pacific. This company changed the name to Discovery Harbour to recognize the location where Hawaii was discovered, and this company energetically set out to bring the golfing community to fruition.

With the help of golfing architect Robert Trent Jones, a world-class course was laid out on the natural sloping hillside meandering through the building lots. The spacious green fairways provided a pastoral setting and open views to the sea beyond. Both the homeowners and the golfers were offered a place of beauty and peacefulness. It could be likened to a natural amphitheater where everyone had a good seat.

Some alterations were made to the initial plans, and final approval for the golf course, clubhouse, and a place for lodging, dining, and shopping came in 1972. Some homes were built and ready for occupancy. The clubhouse was built in 1972. William Apo Young did the wonderful stonework that gives the

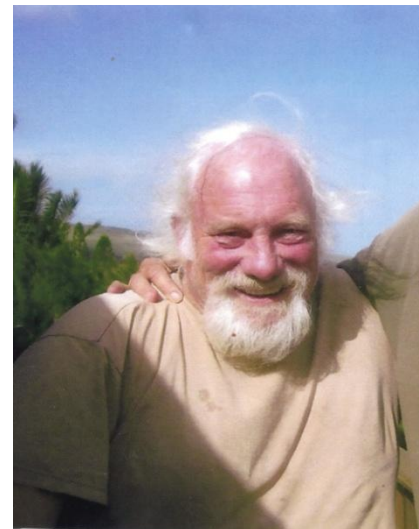


building distinctive character. His son Nelson told how the walls are wider at the bottom than at the top and were built to be able to withstand the movements and tremors that occur on the island. The clubhouse was where the golfer started, paid his fee and rented a golf cart. Residents paid a monthly user cost. The clubhouse also had a bar and served a light lunch; the lodge hadn't yet been built. Mr. Young also built secure walls to preserve two ancient heiaus along the fourth fairway and one on the tenth.

A Home Owners Association (HOA) was established in 1972. The Association would be governed by its own members, and every lot owner would be a member. The objective was to operate for the benefit of all residents of the community, preserving the community's appearance and quality of life. Directors are elected annually, and there are subcommittees in charge of various aspects of the community – architectural, fire safety, neighborhood watch, social. The Association erected their own building in the mid 1980's, a place to hold meetings and social events. It's used daily, the hub of activities – quilting, exercise classes, yoga, hula lessons, Hawaiian and Spanish language classes. Also, individuals can rent the hall for their own personal use. The facility has encouraged friendships and unity within the community.

Cal-Pacific set up the operation of the golf course in the way many courses in planned communities were begun at that time. They agreed to lease to the HOA the running of the golf course for 15 years, after which time the HOA would assume full ownership. The HOA would fund the operation through monthly dues paid by the lot owners. In 1972, when the golf course opened, there were only 50-60 private owners, so the HOA was controlled by Cal-Pacific who owned most of the lots, and they had the expertise to give the project an excellent start. It was a good plan, and if it went as expected Cal-Pacific would have made a good profit after 15 years by selling the remaining lots, and the HOA would have had the experienced assistance of Cal-Pacific to prepare them to carry on the operation of the golf course.

The development was off to a great start, and the success of the venture attracted the interest of a Japanese company, American Showa in 1973, a time when Japan's economy was booming and they were looking for places to make good investments. They expressed their interest in purchasing Discovery Harbour, but requested that Cal-Pacific remove the clause about the HOA becoming owners of the golf course in 15 years. HOA members had some apprehension about taking on the responsibility of operating and maintaining the golf course and agreed to give up their rights. In return Cal-Pacific gave existing homeowners 20 years of free golf, gave the HOA two free building lots (land later used to build the fire station), and a cash settlement of \$100,000. (Of course, most of the \$100,000 went back to Cal-Pacific as they owned most of the lots.) With that adjustment made, American Showa became the new owners of Discovery Harbour, with an important agreement added to the HOA



contract – that they would continue good maintenance on the golf course until 1994.

News about the fantastic golf course and the idyllic setting for homes was advertised on the mainland. When Bill Gundaker came from Lake Tahoe in 1979, five homes had been built. He said, “It was beautiful here. The golf course was meticulously maintained. Even the trees and bushes along the roadways were manicured. We had the whole place to ourselves for years. Few people came.” A big factor that accounts for the low attendance at the golf course was the unpaved access roads. Both Kamaoa and South Point Roads were gravel until the early 1990's.

American Showa's manager Percy Lum let Bill and some other residents, who were construction workers, put up a work shed near #10 Fairway so they could do some projects around the development. One important building they constructed in the early 80's was the fire station. It was difficult to get homeowner's insurance because the Discovery Harbour location was so far from a fire house. The county provided a truck after they had a building to house it.

After the roads were paved, building increased. When Joe Klecak moved to Discovery Harbour in 1989, there were 25 houses; when Clara Lemmens came in 1996, there were 90. Today there are close to 300 and with the aesthetic design, there is still no feeling of congestion.



American Showa's business manager Robert Yamamoto's friendly personality and good English assured good relationships with residents, visitors, and



workers in the 1990's. Harry Hayselden, grandson of the man who sold the land for development, worked for American Showa for 22 years. He said he mowed every day ... “The greens and fairways were kept in excellent condition.” Nelson Young, who also helped on the grounds, explained that managing a golf course is really an agricultural project – raising and maintaining the proper grasses, keeping out weeds, fertilizing as needed, and watering. It takes a lot of water in an area where the volcanic soil is so porous and the winds are so drying.

The Japanese company put a great deal of money and effort into trying to make a success of Discovery Harbour, but never could make ends meet. In the 1990's, when the Japanese economy was floundering, they sold lots at lowered prices to raise funds, but still were unable to run the business profitably. Discouraged, in 1992, they reduced their maintenance and management efforts, and the golf course quickly reflected the neglect. Homeowners prepared to take this problem to court as American Showa had

contracted to properly maintain the golf course until 1994. The HOA contacted golf-course specialist Vernon Evangelista to evaluate the conditions and needs of the course. After careful assessment, he presented the HOA with a proposal of what had to be done to bring the course back to its former standard. The case was finally settled in 1996. American Showa maintain the golf course as it had been formerly groomed for an additional five years, free golf was given to all homeowners for five years, and the HOA was granted two building lots.

A Japanese company, Discovery Harbour Holdings, owned by Iketa Satura, bought Discovery Harbour in 1999; the company president Gerald Wong managed the new enterprise. Mr. Wong continued to have the grounds of the golf course maintained but did not re-open the business. Unable to see a way to make a profit, he gradually sold the remaining house lots to cover the cost of maintenance. Dale Northup, who moved to Discovery with his wife Betty in 1999, volunteered to manage and maintain the golf course so residents and visitors could use it on a "donation" basis. Since it wasn't operated as a business, a fee couldn't be charged nor the money kept. Most people paid 5-dollars to play, and the money collected was donated to various local youth



organizations. Dale volunteered in that way for seven years and raised \$15,215. This method of operation ended in 2007 when Mr. Wong had to cut back on the mowing of the golf course and the golf carts were stolen. It was a sad day at Discovery Harbour.

The operation died but the hope and spirit of the residents continued; they wanted to keep the golf course "alive." Several residents bought lawn tractors to mow the fairways.

That's been a huge commitment. Why do they do it? It's so that occasionally some owners can play a bit of golf, but mostly it's for appearance and safety. People who moved there like the look of a golf course and want to preserve that view. Another reason for keeping up the fairways is that property values will drop if there is no golf course. Also, there's a fear of fire; if the grasses grow tall and dry out, fire could spread very quickly. Another fire hazard are the Christmasberry trees that are invading and overtaking native plants. Joe Klecak said there were few in 1989 when he moved in. The leaves of that plant have oil in them so are flammable.

Waiohinu was a thriving community before the devastation of Mauna Loa. Now many area residents commute to resorts north of Kona to do hotel work because there are few job opportunities in the area. A new company, South Point Investment Group, purchased it in 2009. But have not reopened the golf course. Nevertheless, the goodwill and dedication of residents continues with their volunteer mowing and maintenance. People still enjoy rounds of golf, and Discovery Harbour's magnificent view and pleasant ambiance have been preserved.