Bohemian Grove

Bohemian Grove is a 2700-acre (**unknown operator: u'strong'** ha) campground located at 20601 Bohemian Avenue, in Monte Rio, California, belonging to a private San Francisco-based men's art club known as the Bohemian Club. In mid-July each year, Bohemian Grove hosts a two-week, three-weekend encampment of some of the most powerful men in the world.^{[1][2]}

Introduction

The Bohemian Club's all-male membership includes artists, particularly musicians, as well prominent as many business leaders, government officials (including many former U.S. presidents), senior media executives, and people of power.^{[3][4]} Members may invite guests to the Grove although those guests are subject to a screening procedure. A guest's first glimpse of the Grove typically is during the "Spring Jinks" in June, preceding the main July encampment. Bohemian club members can schedule private day-use events at the Grove any time it is not being used for Club-wide purposes, and are allowed at these times to bring spouses, family and friends, though female and minor guests must be off the property by 9 or 10 p.m.^[5]



Summer, 1967 at Owls Nest Camp with two future U.S. presidents. Around the table, left to right: Preston Hotchkis, Ronald Reagan, Harvey Hancock (standing), Richard Nixon, Glenn T. Seaborg, Jack Sparks, (unidentified individual), (unidentified individual), and Edwin W. Pauley. Retrieved July 15, 2009.

After 40 years of membership the men earn "Old Guard" status, giving them reserved seating at the Grove's daily talks, as well as other perquisites.

The Club motto is "Weaving Spiders Come Not Here," which implies that outside concerns and business deals are to be left outside. When gathered in groups, Bohemians usually adhere to the injunction, though discussion of business often occurs between pairs of members.^[2] Important political and business deals have been developed at the Grove.^[5] The Grove is particularly famous for a Manhattan Project planning meeting that took place there in September 1942, which subsequently led to the atomic bomb. Those attending this meeting, apart from Ernest Lawrence and military officials, included the president of Harvard and representatives of Standard Oil and General Electric. Grove members take particular pride in this event and often relate the story to new attendees.^[2]

History

The tradition of a summer encampment was established six years after the Bohemian Club was formed in 1872.^[2] Henry "Harry" Edwards, a stage actor and founding member, announced that he was relocating to New York City to further his career. On June 29, 1878, somewhat fewer than 100 Bohemians gathered in the Redwoods in Marin County near Taylorville (present-day Samuel P. Taylor State Park) for an evening sendoff party in Edwards' honor.^[6] Freely flowing liquor and some Japanese lanterns put a glow on the festivities, and club members retired at a late hour to the modest comfort of blankets laid on the dense mat of Redwood needles. This festive gathering was repeated the next year without Edwards, and became the club's yearly encampment.^[7] By 1882 the members of the Club camped together at various locations in both Marin and Sonoma County, including the present-day Muir Woods and a redwood grove that once stood near Duncans Mills, several miles down the Russian River from the current location. From 1893 Bohemians rented the current location, and in 1899 purchased it from Melvin Cyrus Meeker who had developed a successful logging operation in the area.^[2] Gradually over the next decades, members of the Club purchased land surrounding the original location to the perimeter of the basin in which it resides.^[2]



In the 1870s, Henry "Harry" Edwards was an actor with the California Theatre Stock Company, a founding Bohemian and the head entomologist at the California Academy of Sciences.

Writer and journalist William Henry Irwin said of the Grove,

You come upon it suddenly. One step and its glory is over you. There is no perspective; you cannot get far enough away from one of the trees to see it as a whole. There they stand, a world of height above you, their pinnacles hidden by their topmost fringes of branches or lost in the sky.^[8]

Not long after the Club's establishment by newspaper journalists, it was commandeered by prominent San Francisco-based businessmen, who provided the financial resources necessary to acquire further land and facilities at the Grove. However, they still retained the "bohemians"—the artists and musicians—who continued to entertain international members and guests.^[2]

Membership and operation

The Bohemian Club is a private club; only active members of the Club (known as "Bohos" or "Grovers"^[9]) and their guests may visit the Grove. These guests have been known to include politicians and notable figures from countries outside the U.S.^[2] Particularly during the midsummer encampment, the number of guests is strictly limited due to the small size of the facilities. Nevertheless, up to 2,900 members and guests have been reported as attending some of the annual encampments.

The membership list has included every Republican and some Democratic U.S. presidents since 1923, many cabinet officials, directors and CEOs of large corporations including major financial institutions. Major military contractors, oil companies, banks (including the Federal Reserve), utilities (including nuclear power) and national media (broadcast and print) have high-ranking officials as club members or guests.^[10]

Camp valets

Camp valets are responsible for the operation of the individual camps. The "head" valets are akin to a general manager's position at a resort, club, restaurant, or hotel. Service staff include female workers whose presence at the Grove is limited to daylight hours and to central areas close to the main gate. Male workers may be housed at the Grove within the boundaries of the camp to which they are assigned or in peripheral service areas. High-status workers stay in small private quarters but most workers are housed in rustic bunkhouses.^[2]

Facilities

The main encampment area consists of 160 acres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** km²) of old-growth redwood trees over 1,000 years old, with some trees exceeding 300 feet (**unknown operator: u'strong'** m) in height.^[11]

The primary activities taking place at the Grove are varied and expansive entertainment, such as a grand main stage and a smaller, more intimate stage. Thus, the majority of common facilities are entertainment venues, interspersed among the giant redwoods.

There are also sleeping quarters, or "camps" scattered throughout the grove, of which it is reported there were a total of 118 as of 2007. These camps, which are frequently patrilineal, are the principal means through which high-level business and political contacts and friendships are formed.^[2]

The pre-eminent camps are:^{[2][12]}

- Hill Billies (Big Business/Banking/Politics/Universities/Media/Texas Business);
- Mandalay (Big Business/Defense Contractors/Politics/U.S. Presidents);
- Cave Man (Think Tanks/Oil Companies/Banking/Defense Contractors/Universities/Media);
- Stowaway (Rockefeller Family Members/Oil Companies/Banking/Think Tanks);
- Uplifters (Corporate Executives/Big Business);
- Owls Nest (U.S. Presidents/Military/Defense Contractors);
- Hideaway (Foundations/Military/Defense Contractors);
- Isle of Aves (Military/Defense Contractors);
- Lost Angels (Banking/Defense Contractors/Media);
- Silverado squatters (Big Business/Defense Contractors);
- Sempervirens (California-based Corporations);
- Hillside (Military—Joint Chiefs of Staff);
- Idlewild (California-based Corporations)

The central spaces for recreation and entertainment are:

• *Grove Stage*—an amphitheater with seating for 2,000 used primarily for the Grove Play production, on the last weekend of the midsummer encampment. The stage extends up the hillside, and is also home to the second largest



A Bohemian tent in the 1900s, sheltering Porter Garnett, George Sterling and Jack London

outdoor pipe organ in the world.

- *Field Circle*—a bowl-shaped amphitheater used for the mid-encampment "Low Jinks" musical comedy, for "Spring Jinks" in early June and for a variety of other performances.
- *Campfire Circle*—has a campfire pit in the middle of the circle, surrounded by carved redwood log benches. Used for smaller performances in a more intimate setting.
- Museum Stage—a semi-outdoor venue with a covered stage. Lectures and small ensemble performances.
- Dining Circle—seating approximately 1,500 diners simultaneously.
- Clubhouse—designed by Bernard Maybeck in 1903, completed in 1904 on a bluff overlooking the Russian River;^[13] a multi-purpose dining, drinking and entertainment building; the site of the Manhattan Project planning meeting held in 1942.
- *The Owl Shrine and the Lake*—an artificial lake in the middle of the grove, used for the noon-time concerts and also the venue of the *Cremation of Care*, that takes place on the first Saturday of the encampment. It is also the location of the 12:30 p.m. daily "Lakeside Talks." These significant informal talks (many on public policy issues) have been given over the years by entertainers, professors, astronauts, business leaders, cabinet officers, CIA directors, future presidents and former presidents.^[14]

Symbolism and rituals



trees behind a stage at one edge of a man-made pond Since the founding of the club, the Bohemian Grove's mascot has been an owl, symbolizing knowledge. A 40-foot (**unknown operator: u'strong'** m) hollow owl statue made of concrete over steel supports stands at the head of the lake in the Grove; this Owl Shrine was designed by sculptor and two-time club president Haig Patigian, and built in the 1920s.^[15] Since 1929, the Owl Shrine has served as the backdrop of the yearly *Cremation of Care* ceremony.^[2]

The Club's patron saint is John of Nepomuk, who legend says suffered death at the hands of a Bohemian monarch rather than disclose the confessional secrets of the queen. A large wood carving of St. John in cleric robes with his index finger over his lips stands at the shore of the lake in the Grove, symbolizing the secrecy kept by the Grove's

attendees throughout its long history.^[2]

Cremation of Care

The *Cremation of Care* ceremony was first conducted in the Bohemian Grove at the Midsummer encampment in 1881, devised by James F. Bowman with George T. Bromley playing the High Priest.^[16] It was originally set up within the plot of the serious "High Jinks" dramatic performance on the first weekend of the summer encampment, after which the spirit of "Care", slain by the Jinks hero, was solemnly cremated. The ceremony served as a catharsis for pent-up high spirits, and "to present symbolically the salvation of the trees by the club..."^[17] The *Cremation of Care* was separated from the Grove Play in 1913 and moved to the first night to become "an exorcising of the Demon to



ensure the success of the ensuing two weeks."^[18] The Grove Play was moved to the last weekend of the encampment.^[19]

The ceremony takes place in front of the Owl Shrine, a 40-foot (**unknown operator: u'strong'** m) hollow owl statue made of concrete over steel supports. The moss- and lichen-covered statue simulates a natural rock formation, yet holds electrical and audio equipment within it. For many years, a recording of the voice of club member Walter Cronkite was used as the voice of The Owl during the ceremony.^[1] Music and pyrotechnics accompany the ritual for dramatic effect.

Grove Play

Each year, a Grove Play is performed for one night during the final weekend of the summer encampment. The play is a large-scale musical theatrical production, written and composed by club members, involving some 300 people, including chorus, cast, stage crew and orchestra.^[20] The first Grove Play was performed in 1902; during the war years 1943–1945 the stage was dark. In 1975, an observer estimated that the Grove Play cost between \$20,000–30,000, an amount that would be as high as \$130,000 in today's dollars.^[20]



A dress rehearsal for the 1909 Grove Play, St. Patrick at Tara

Protests and controversies

With its combination of wealth and power, Bohemian Grove's secrecy has been a target for protest for many years. The Bohemian Grove Action Network of Occidental, California organizes protests and has aided journalists who wish to penetrate the secrecy surrounding the encampment. Over the years, individuals have infiltrated the Grove then later published video and claimed accounts of the activities at Bohemian Grove.

Infiltrations

In the summer of 1989, *Spy* magazine writer Philip Weiss spent some seven days in the camp posing as a guest, which led to his November 1989 article "Inside Bohemian Grove".^[1] He wrote about uninhibited behavior he witnessed: "You know you are inside the Bohemian Grove when you come down a trail in the woods and hear piano music from amid a group of tents and then round a bend to see a man with a beer in one hand and his penis in the other, urinating into the bushes. This is the most gloried-in ritual of the encampment, the freedom of powerful men to pee wherever they like..."^[1] Weiss noticed "hundreds of cigars whose smokers had ignited them in defiance of the California Forest Service's posted warnings."^[1]

On July 15, 2000, controversial paleoconservative filmmaker Alex Jones and his cameraman, Mike Hanson, walked into the Grove. With a hidden camera, Jones and Hanson were able to film the *Cremation of Care* ceremony. The footage was the centerpiece of Jones' documentary *Dark Secrets: Inside Bohemian Grove*.^[21] Jones claimed that the *Cremation of Care* was an "ancient Canaanite, Luciferian, Babylon mystery religion ceremony," and that the owl statue was Moloch. The Grove and Jones' investigation were covered by Jon Ronson in Channel 4's four-part documentary, *Secret Rulers of the World*. Ronson documented his view of the ritual in his book, *Them: Adventures With Extremists*, writing "My lasting impression was of an all-pervading sense of immaturity: the Elvis impersonators, the pseudo-pagan spooky rituals, the heavy drinking. These people might have reached the apex of their professions but emotionally they seemed trapped in their college years."^[22]

Also filmed for *The Order of Death*^[23] was Jones' return to the entrance of the Bohemian Grove in 2005 where he filmed a protest organized by the Bohemian Grove Action Network that took place at the Grove's entrance on Bohemian Highway, only to discover a majority of the protesters engaging in an "occult counter-ritual" known as the *Resurrection of Care*, supposedly a counter-ritual against the *Cremation of Care*. Jones' narration for the film lambasted the protesters' actions and motivations from a religious standpoint. In 2005, Chris Jones (no relation) walked into the Grove when hired as an employee, and videotaped the Owl Shrine in daylight, even venturing inside

On January 19, 2002, 37-year-old Richard McCaslin was arrested after his nighttime infiltration of the Bohemian Grove, where he set several fires. He was heavily armed and wearing a skull mask and outfit with "Phantom Patriot" written across the chest.^[26]

Actor/writer Harry Shearer (*This Is Spinal Tap, Saturday Night Live, The Simpsons*), who has attended at least one Bohemian Club event, wrote and directed *The Teddy Bears' Picnic*, a parody of Bohemian Grove mock pagan pageantry and drunken revelry.^[27]

Women

Though no woman has ever been given full membership in the Bohemian Club, the four female honorary members were hostess Margaret Bowman, poet Ina Coolbrith (who served as librarian for the Club), actress Elizabeth Crocker Bowers and writer Sara Jane Lippincott.^[19] Since Coolbrith's death in 1928, no other woman was made a member. These honorary members and other women guests have been allowed into the Bohemian "City Club" building and as daytime guests of the Grove, but not to the upper floors of the City Club nor as guests to the main summer encampment at the Grove.^[19] Annual "Ladies' Jinks" were held at the Club especially for spouses and invited guests.^[19]

In 1978 the Bohemian Club was charged with a discrimination lawsuit by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing over its refusal to hire women employees. In January 1981 Judge Robert Kendall issued a decision supporting the practices of the Club, noting that club members at the Grove "urinate in the open without even the use of rudimentary toilet facilities" and that the presence of females would alter club members' behavior.^[28] On October 17, 1981 the Department of Fair Employment and Housing countered the Kendall ruling by ordering the Club to begin recruiting and hiring women as employees.^[29] In 1986 the Bohemian Club went to the California Supreme Court over the issue, arguing that their freedom of association was being harmed; the Court found against the Club and denied a review in 1987, forcing the Club to begin hiring female workers during the summer encampment at the Grove in Monte Rio.^[30] This ruling became quoted as a legal precedent and was discussed during the 1995-1996 floor debate surrounding California Senate Bill SB 2110 (Maddy), a proposed bill concerning whether tax-exempt organizations (including fraternal clubs) should be exempt from the Unruh Civil Rights Act.^[31]

Logging

Outside of the central camp area which is the site of the old-growth grove, but within the 2712 acres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** km²) owned by the Bohemian Club, logging activities have been underway since 1984. Approximately 11000000 board feet (**unknown operator: u'strong'** m³) of lumber equivalents were removed from the surrounding redwood and Douglas fir forest from 1984 to 2007. In 2007, the Bohemian Club board filed application for a nonindustrial logging permit available to landowners with less than 2500 acres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** km²) of timberland, which would allow them to steadily increase their logging in the second-growth stands from 800000 board feet (**unknown operator: u'strong'** m³) per year to 1700000 board feet (**unknown operator: u'strong'** m³) over the course of the 50-year permit.^[32] The board had been advised by Tom Bonnicksen, a retired forestry professor with more than 35 years of experience in the field, that they should conduct group selection logging to reduce the risk of fire burning through the dense second-growth stands, damaging the old-growth forest the Club wants to protect. The Bohemian Club stated that an expansion of logging activities was needed to prevent fires, and that money made from the sale of the lumber would be used to stabilize access roads and to clear fire-promoting species like tanoaks and underbrush.^[33] The California Department of Fish and Game, have instead recommended single-tree logging to preserve the habitats of murrelets and spotted owls in senescent trees. Philip Rundel, University of California, Berkeley professor of biology said that redwoods aren't very flammable and

"This is clearly a logging project, not a project to reduce fire hazard".^[32] Reed F. Noss, professor at the University of California, Davis, has written that fires within redwood forests do not need to be prevented, that young redwoods are adapted to regenerate well in the destruction left behind by the fires typical of the climate.^[34]

After controversy raised by opponents of the harvesting plan, the club moved to clearly establish their qualification for the permit by offering 163 acres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** km²) to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in Missoula, Montana for a conservation easement. A further 56.75 acres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** m²) were written off as not being available for commercial logging, bringing the total to 2316 acres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** km²) and thereby qualifying for the permit. Opponents and their lawyers interpret the relevant law as counting all timberland and not just that actually subject to the logging permit. They state that if the total of timberland is counted, 2535.75 acres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** km²) are owned by the club, so the permit should not be granted.^[32]

On March 10, 2011 Judge René A. Chouteau rejected the Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan (NTMP) that Cal-Fire had approved. The suit, brought by the Sierra Club and the Bohemian Redwood Rescue Club, sought to have the NTMP annulled. The ruling calls on the Bohemian Club to draft a new NTMP that offers alternatives to its proposed rate of logging. At present the Bohemian Club is not allowed to log any of its property.^[35]

Quotations

- "The Bohemian club! Did you say Bohemian club? That's where all those rich Republicans go up and stand naked against redwood trees right? I've never been to the Bohemian club but you oughta go. It'd be good for you. You'd get some fresh air."—President Bill Clinton to a heckler^[36]
- "The Bohemian Grove, that I attend from time to time—the Easterners and the others come there—but it is the most faggy goddamn thing you could ever imagine, that San Francisco crowd that goes in there; it's just terrible! I mean I won't shake hands with anybody from San Francisco."—President Richard M. Nixon on the Watergate tapes, Bohemian Club member starting in 1953.^{[37][14]}
- "If I were to choose the speech that gave me the most pleasure and satisfaction in my political career, it would be
 my Lakeside Speech at the Bohemian Grove in July 1967. Because this speech traditionally was off the record it
 received no publicity at the time. But in many important ways it marked the first milestone on my road to the
 presidency."—President Richard Nixon, *Memoirs* (1978).^[14]

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