

Hopland & Fountain Ranch

Historical Information

The town of Hopland was first known as Sanel and was part of an early Spanish land grant.

Fernando Feliz was the first non-native settler in the Sanel township, sometime before 1850. Fernando had owned a land grant in Marin County named “Novata” but sold or disposed of that grant and applied for and received the Sanel grant in 1844 and moved his family north to Sanel.

In 1874 the town changed its name from Sanel to Hopland because of all the hops grown on ranches and farms around the town. Also, in 1874 a toll road to Ukiah from Cloverdale on the eastern side of the Russian River was completed making the trip north from Cloverdale more direct.

The present-day road to Fountain Ranch, Mountain House Road (Mendocino County road 111) is fairly quite today but before 1934 it was the main highway north through Mendocino County, so you could imagine what it might have been like. That same year the old toll road from Cloverdale to Hopland was upgraded and renamed Highway 101.

In 1888 the North Pacific Railroad was built between Cloverdale and Hopland and there were stations along the way to onload or offload people or goods. One of the railroad stations was on Fountain Ranch and it was called “Fountain Station”, it was located 2.5 miles south of Hopland. There used to be signal lanterns at the old Victorian house (we call the Big House) on Fountain Ranch for use in signaling a train to stop at the station. Fountain Station had its own road from Mountain House Road to the station. There are one or two places on Fountain Ranch that livestock from neighboring ranches were brought and held so they could be shipped by rail from Fountain Station.

The Big House on Fountain Ranch was built sometime in the mid to late 1800's. At one time it was used as a stage stop on the main road north through Mendocino County. A stage stop combined with Fountain Railroad Station close by is indicative of all the activity that must have been present on the property in the late 1800's and early 1900's. The old house is constructed of full dimension redwood lumber and has a brick foundation. The house was first equipped with gas lighting then later electricity. Heating was accomplished with a steam boiler fueled first by charcoal then later by

diesel fuel. Early newspaper pieces dating from the 1880's have been found in the attic. The house was used extensively until around 1984.

Until the 1990's there used to be a very large barn not far from the Big House that was once used to house horses and carriages along with a big loft for loose hay produced on the property for use by the horses. The barn was taken down in the 1990's after it was determined it could not be repaired safely.

In the early 1980's a large earthen dam was constructed on the property for water storage to be used for irrigation, recreation and stock watering. The California State Division of Water Rights issued a permit for this reservoir in 1984 for 346 acre-feet of water. In 1989 an additional permit on the reservoir was granted for 94 acre-feet of water held back by flash-boards. The reservoir was stocked by the California Department of Fish & Game in the early 1980's with Florida strain black large mouth bass and feeder fish. Since then many bass weighing over 10 lbs. have been caught in the lake.

Besides large mouth bass there are Canadian geese, wood ducks, mallards, teal, and other water fowl often found on the lake. Wild turkeys, coastal black tailed deer, wild pigs, California quail and band-tailed pigeon are also found on Fountain Ranch. For many years Fountain Ranch has had two hunting leases, one for hunting black tailed deer during the permitted season beginning in August of each year and the other for hunting wild pigs. The income from the two hunting leases has been \$10,000 annually.

In addition to the hunting income another source of income from the property has been leasing the ranch to a livestock producer and allowing cattle to feed on the grass grown on the ranch. The ranch was leased in 2018 for \$26,000 for twelve months and there is a current offer from another livestock producer to lease the property at that same rate.

Many neighboring properties grow wine grapes and Fountain Ranch has a great potential for wine grape production. With the existing licensed water rights, the good bottom land and hill pastures along with the water delivery infrastructure already in place there is a tremendous potential for wine grape production on Fountain Ranch.

There are several notable natural land features on Fountain Ranch. The main feature are the twin peaks on the property that you can see as you travel south on highway 101 long before you get close to the property, one mountain with two separate peaks. The southern most peak also has "Balancing Rock", one very large boulder precipitously balanced on another buried rock; the upper rock that weighs several tons will rock in its position if pushed. On the ridge not too far from the north peak a pair of Bald Eagles have nested for several years.

In various locations on the property you can find sites where charcoal was produced in the late 1800's for either use on the property or to be shipped off as a source of income. The sites are generally round flat areas with a concave ditch around them.

Hardwood trees were cut and dragged to the site covered with soil then set on fire. The charcoal resulted from the very slow and not complete combustion of the wood.

One locally very well-known geologic formation found on Fountain Ranch is Frog Woman Rock. This immense rock is located just south of Pieta Creek and on the west side of the Russian River. Formerly known as Squaw Rock, as you drive north from Cloverdale on highway 101, if you look carefully at the profile of the rock at the very top you can see the outline of a face of a Native American Indian. There is an old Indian legend about the rock and the following excerpt is from "*The History of Mendocino County, California*", Alley, Bowen & Co., Publishers, San Francisco, CA 1880.

INDIANS. - The Sanels were once a large and powerful tribe, but time has served to deplete their numbers very greatly. When Feliz located on his grant, their rancheria was located south of the present site of Hopland, and was very extensive. It is now about one and a half miles north of the town, and there are, all told, about one hundred and fifty left. They are industrious as a rule, working at whatever they can get to do, and making good hands.

The following legend of the "Lover's Leap" was read by Miss Fannie Lamar at Mrs. Poston's Seminary August, 1878:

"In the deep Canada through which Russian river comes cascading down with rollicking music from the mountains into the broad valley below, a great majestic rock towers several hundred feet perpendicularly from the bank of the river and slopes off to the westward upon a gentle incline. Passengers and tourists who travel the road which runs near its base, gaze with awe and admiration upon this great monument of Nature's marvelous work, and listen attentively to a romantic legend familiar to those who dwell in its vicinity. The story, as related by a native Californian lady, Miss Chatta Feliz, who was reared near this great rock, and who was a cotemporary with the principal actors in the tragedy, runs nearly as follows: Before the conquest of this country by the United States, and when the old Catholic Missions retained much of their primitive glory and beneficent power, many of the Indians were gathered into their folds for religious instruction. With the holy inspiration of the Church, which these simple children of Nature imbibed, they developed a passionate fondness for the fashions and ornaments of civilization. About ten miles south of the great rock, near where now stands the beautiful village of Cloverdale, dwelt a tribe of Indians, among whom was a young chief, a sort of Prince Imperial, whose name was Cachow. He was a fine looking fellow of faultless physique, a mighty hunter, skilled in the use of the bow and arrow, renowned for his prowess and rich in the trophies of the chase as well as in the plunder of the battle field. To all this hoard of wealth and personal accomplishments he had added the glamour acquired by a short sojourn at the mission of San Rafael, and many beads and other trinkets,

the gifts of the kind padres of that once famous mission. Of course Cachow was, as well as a distinguished prince, and a hero among the braves, a great favorite with the dusky ladies of his own and the neighboring tribes. About six miles north of the great rock, on a beautiful plateau called Sanel, on the bank of the river, were the wigwams of the Sanelanos. The chief of these Indians had a handsome young daughter, named Sotuka, whose small feet and hands, wealth of dark hair, grace and comeliness, and, more than all her extraordinary skill in cooking venison and grasshoppers and making buckeye mush, made her as famous within the radius of her acquaintance as was the Queen of Sheba in her country.

"About the time of which I write, in the early autumn, when the golden harvest of the wild oats had been gathered into the great willow baskets, and the wild fruits were abundant, and the deer and the rabbits were still fat, and fish were plentiful in the streams and easily caught, Sotuka's father made a feast and sent his heralds forth with hospitable greetings and invitations to his neighbors. Among the invited guests was the distinguished Cachow, who, with all his fame and manly beauty and gorgeous trappings, was the cynosure of all eyes, and at once became the idol of the royal Sotuka.

"The juiciest acorns were roasted and pounded with Sotuka's own hands for Cachow, and the choicest delicacies of her basket were selected and prepared for him. In short, while Cachow had completely enthralled the heart of Sotuka, he was not insensible to her great beauty and personal accomplishments; and this, their first meeting, resulted in a betrothal. After an exchange of souvenirs, like lovers of other races, and the festivities being over, Cachow returned to his home with a promise to come back in two moons with a deer skin full of beads for Sotuka's father and make the lovely daughter his bride. But Cachow, like many men who have gone before him and many who have succeeded him, was unfaithful to his promise, and before two moons had waned he wedded another. It happened in the course of events that Cachow and his new love, in making their bridal tour, built their camp fire at the eastern base of the great rock, underneath the precipice. Sotuka had already become apprised of the perfidy of her lover, and while busily meditating and planning revenge, was informed by one of her scouts of the camping place of the bridal party. When night came Sotuka left her wigwam and, alone, hastened through the darkness to the great rock and, ascending the western slope, approached the precipice and looked down, where, by the light of the little camp fire, she saw her faithless lover and his bride fast asleep.

"With the merciless vengeance of 'love to hatred turned,' and the desperation of unrequited affection, she clasped in her arms a stone as large as she could lift and sprang off the fearful height upon her sleeping victims. On the morrow, the Sanelanos and the tribe of Cachow held a grand imposing inquest over the dead trio, and,

having built a great log heap, they placed upon it the three mangled bodies and lighted the funeral pyre Then, to the music of a solemn dirge, the wailings of the mourners and the roaring of the flames, the spirits of the departed, as the Indians say, rode upon a chariot of smoke to the happy hunting ground Since this tragic scene the great rock has been known as 'The Lover's Leap.' “