**THE SEA RANCH AUDIO WALKING TOUR:
ARCHITECTURE, LANDSCAPE, INTENTIONS**

Written and Narrated by Donlyn Lyndon

SEGMENT D: Black Point Prairie, views to the forest, Black Point Public Access Trail and return to the Lodge.

The eastern end of the Black Point Hedgerow, where it meets Moonraker Road, marks the boundary between the Sea Ranch Lodge properties and The Sea Ranch roads and commons which are reserved for use by Members, their guests, and visitors accompanied by docents.

A ranch gate indicates that the Lodge areas to the south are open to passage by hikers and riders, but banned to motor vehicles (except in parking areas).

South of that gate you will be reminded of the great expanse of grasses and brush that once constituted this whole area from the highway to the ocean.

An historical photo posted on the website, **photo D1H**, was taken from roughly above where you're standing, shortly after construction of The Sea Ranch development began.

D1H Aerial view of Sea Ranch Meadow and beyond Photo by Lisa Trumpler

It shows The Sea Ranch Meadow just north of the hedgerow and the extent of the large prairie reaching up towards Gualala Point, with wind-breaking hedgerows planted by ranchers roughly 100 years ago paced out along the highway.

As you passed through the gate toward the south, you may have noticed that the trees to the west become much thicker. Many of these trees were a part of Larry Halprin's work. He told me they had been planted to grow in the lee of the hedgerow, protected from wind until they were strong enough to transplant to other sections of the development. Many were, but in the end so many trees grew on their own, that these were not all transplanted and continued to grow here as a supplement to the hedgerow and further protection for Black Point Prairie. They now form a large grouping between the houses along Black Point Reach and the Lodge Properties which bound it on the south. Such later thickenings of the linear hedgerows throughout The Sea Ranch resulting from additional growth, often unintended, have changed somewhat the character of the landscape. This is a concern

2

being addressed now by the Planning and Commons Landscape Committees.

D2 Black Point and vegetation on north of Black Point Prairie

We call this whole Segment (south of the gate that you're now traversing) Black Point Prairie, as it is dominated by the silhouette of Black Point against the ocean, its rocky uprising of stone cloaked by vegetation. In detail this prairie is richly varied, with differing kinds of vegetation (and thus wildlife habitation) and areas of protected wetlands growth. The trails through it offer expansive views of the whole genre of Sea Ranch landscape: forested slopes, stands of trees, hedgerows, mixed grasses, brush and wildflowers, gently undulating land and a rolling sweep of horizon.

Turning towards the forest, we should remember that many of the houses at The Sea Ranch are located on the upper slopes and in the forest. The accompanying photograph posted on the

website is from a set of photos by Lisa Trumpler, commissioned by Marion Conrad, publicist for Oceanic Properties.

This one, **D3H**, is described as an example of "private homes being built at The Sea Ranch among the Douglas fir, pine and redwoods." The architects were Marquis and Stoller; Claude Stoller later served on The Sea Ranch Design Committee.

D3H House by Marquis and Stoller   Photo by Lisa Trumpler

D4H is another noted house in the forest, in fact the first one independently built, in 1966. It was constructed for Reverdy Johnson, then a young lawyer for Oceanic Properties, who drafted the legal papers governing the development project, including the design review process. His house is a marvelous one, marvelously tiny but with a rich, surpising inside. It was designed by Charles Moore and William Turnbull (Turnbull designed some spirited additions as well, constructed in 1973).

D4H Reverdy Johnson House 1966 (MLTW, Moore & Turnbull Architects)

Many others followed. These are not included in this walking tour, since for many (including myself), it would be beyond the scope of even a strenuous walk. You'll note, though, that on the following Commons Landscape Committee map **D5H** there are a number of trails that thread through the forest, most within the commons and creeks that follow the lower slopes of ravines.

Proceeding along this trail south of the ranch out into Black Point Prairie, provides a place to pay attention to several fundamental characteristics of this early section of The Sea Ranch.

Note, as you walk, the way that Moonraker Road turns and reaches up the hillside across the highway, climbing in a draw that starts in a bowl of wet land and vegetation on the other side of Highway 1 and snakes up the grade with a minimum of disruption to the natural contours. This was the first example on The Sea Ranch of this way of building infrastructure keyed to the natural landscape.

The accompanying Commons Landscape Committee map, **D5H**, shows the full scope of Moonraker Road, marked in red, from Moonraker Recreation Center up through the bowl and on farther into the forest, eventually reaching all the way to the top at Timber Ridge Road.
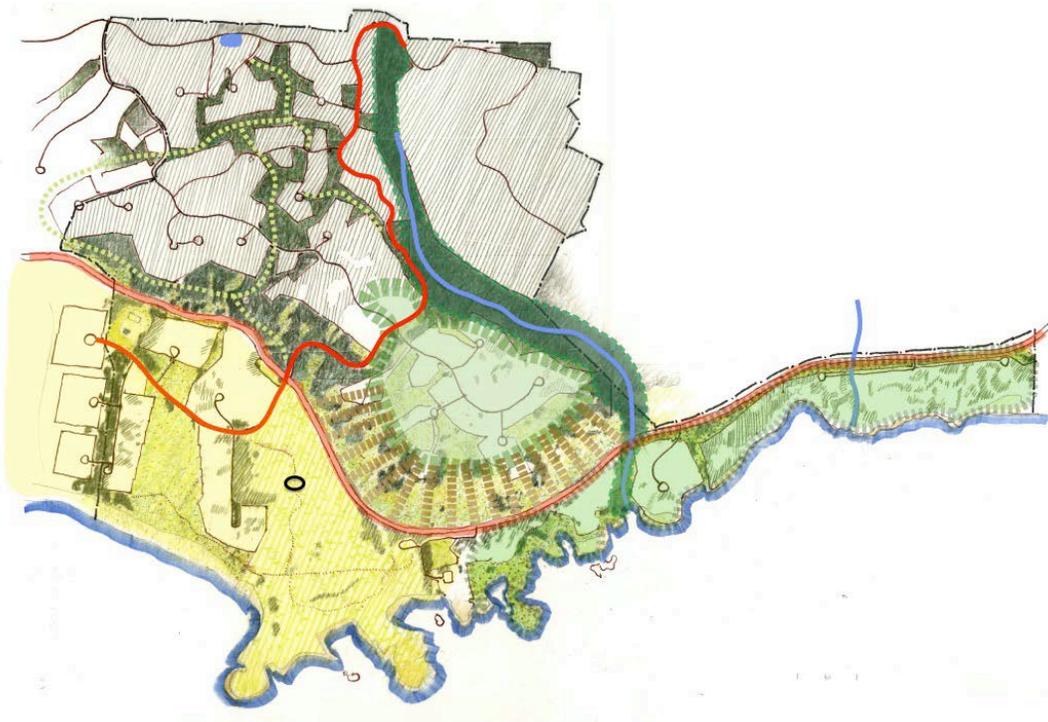
D5H Commons Landscape Committee analysis map for CLC Area 1, drawing by N. Scott Smit

The slopes and terraces are also shown, as well as the Forest Front and a deep ravine and watercourse that turns around the prominent large landform (Moonraker Slope) projecting forward. Highway 1, the Signature Hedgerows, meadows and the bluff are shown as are distinctions between privately owned lots (greyed) and areas that are either held as commons, or are part of the Lodge properties.

The area you are in now, not far from the intersection with the Public Access Trail, is marked on the map with an oval.

On any map of The Sea Ranch you can see that this road moves up all the way to the ridge along a deep forested canyon and connects with Timber Ridge Road and Crows Nest Road. These roads reach out laterally to offer passage through the redwood and fir forest or out onto the natural terrace overlooking Black Point Prairie, providing dramatic views up and down the coast. By intent, only a few of the houses on these upper reaches are visible through the lower vegetation forming the Forest Front, which serves as an emblem of the reaches of forest and timbering land that lie beyond and as a natural background for the great sweep of meadows along the ocean shelf that are a dominant characterizing feature of The Sea Ranch landscape.

Just to the southeast of the Moonraker/Route 1 intersection there is a crucial viewpoint across Black Point Prairie to the ocean and the mound of Black Point. This view has been protected by State law in the provisions of the Bane Bill, which designates areas that must remain open to views from the highway. Early development had planted at this intersection a grove of pine trees that extended the vegetation down the hill into the meadows. Some decades later when the trees had grown thick and high, they were required to be removed in order to protect that designated view. This area, like many others along Highway 1, needs continuing attention to keep it clear from brush and volunteer tree growth so that legislated provisions can be maintained.

At the far side of this great meadow the edges of the Lodge building and their associated hedgerow shape the area, opposite the prominent mound of Black Point, **D6**.

D6 Hedgerow line continued by Sea Ranch Lodge buildings

Midway along the passage through this area there is an intersection with the Public Access Trail which leads from the parking area on the highway down across the meadow alongside the pines and beyond the southernmost of the Hedgerow Houses to the Public Access Stairs leading down to Black Point Beach. The Bluff Trail then goes back to the Lodge.

As you cross Black Point Prairie towards the Lodge, you will recognize the way in which the masses of the Lodge buildings continue the line of the hedgerow and have single slope roofs turned towards each other in a way that is a frequent feature of Sea Ranch architecture, as it is in Condominium One.

When you approach higher ground and turn to look back across the surrounding landscape, **D7**, you may be reminded of the following ideas for architecture at The Sea Ranch.

D7 View from edge of Sea Ranch Lodge property

- Buildings settle into their place with roof slopes that relate to the land, adjoining buildings and vegetation, deflect prevailing winds and gather in the sun.
- Construction is with natural materials that weather and change with the landscape.
- Meadows are large open space of grasses and brush, bounded on either side by hedgerows, with closely related buildings.
- The coastal landscape is backed by slopes leading up into the forest where houses take their place deep among the trees, or are tucked discretely within the forest edge.
- Architecture here is intended to reflect human presence in a way that carefully brings people into touch with this great landscape environment, adjusting to its forces and sharing its pleasures with neighbors, **D8**.

D8 Summation photo

It's a landscape that has been made by many imaginations, now held in accord by the statement included in each property sale at The Sea Ranch: *"It must be assumed that all owners of property within The Sea Ranch, by virtue of their purchase of such property, are motivated by the character of the natural environment in which their property is located, and accept, for and among themselves, the principle that the development and use of The Sea Ranch must preserve that character for its present and future enjoyment by other owners."*

You will now have visited most of the sites that initiated The Sea Ranch development fifty years ago and which transformed the earlier Del Mar Ranch into a place with very different intentions; a place that was meant to conserve and steward the land, even as it changed from agricultural to recreational use and provided many sites for both permanent and short term inhabitation.

The planning, architecture and design review procedures that have been put in place here were formed to the conditions of the place. By absorbing coastal complexity, with its great meadows, deep forest, steep topography, riparian passages and spaced hedgerows, and bringing to them a clarifying order, their designers, led by Al Boeke and Larry Halprin, and our many colleagues, were intent on conserving the essential character of a rich and varied, evolving landscape.

The Sea Ranch was imagined to be, and has become, a community; a community intent on providing stewardship for these ten miles of marvelous California coast and living within it in a light and lively way.

Thank you for your attention and enjoy the many wonders of this special place.