

Wandering & Wondering

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HILL FOR SALE

57-acre property, one of the largest undeveloped parcels with residential zoning within greater San Francisco Bay Area (see photos). Adjacent to more than 1,200 acres of Golden Gate National Recreation Area, including historic Sweeney Ridge. Could be partially developed as gated subdivision or exclusive private ocean-view estate. Irregular shape. Lies along west-facing slopes of Cattle Hill between Highway 1 and western boundary of GGNRA. Elevation ranges from 100 to 690 feet, with lower southwest portion containing less than 10 acres suitable for subdivision development. Site has some residual trees but contains primarily undisturbed native vegetation. Estimated 800 feet of frontage along Highway 1, and proposed entry road as outlined by Caltrans, are 1,175 feet south of Reina Del Mar Avenue and 1,774 feet north of Rockaway Beach Avenue. All utilities (water, gas, sewer, and phone) along highway can be extended to site. Entire property within Pacifica. Prior owner submitted plan in 2001 for 11-lot subdivision, with balance of property (47 acres) to be donated to GGNRA for trailhead to improve public access to Sweeney Ridge. Other options include development of several ocean-view, gated estate compounds with private trail system for hiking and riding horses. Spectacular ocean views, location next to GGNRA, proximity to San Francisco, and residential zoning provides new owner with opportunity to create both real estate and conservation values at significant discount, with added benefit of short-term seller financing. Sealed bids due November 18. Latest offer \$1,795,000. (adapted from real estate listing posted on Pacifica Riptide)

FRIDGE IT

A Houston Style Magazine article "Who Are the Wealthiest Black People in America?" says:

"Real estate magnet R. Donahue Peebles of Florida (\$350 million) is in eighth place." (Reported on Pacifica Riptide by a regular reader, who says, "A long time ago I set a Google Alert to scan for R. Donahue Peebles. The alert scans the Web for your search term and emails you when it finds any mention of the term. I never turned off the Peebles alert. That's how I got the item about 'real estate magnet.' Then this morning I got the Google Alert that my item was posted on Riptide." And so the "magnet" is now famous on the Internet.)

FRIED BUTTER

"On a fine afternoon at the Texas State Fair, a ringmaster encouraged a gaggle of children to flap their arms like butterfly wings. 'What could possibly go wrong on a day as beautiful as today?' he asked. But a hundred yards away, something had gone quite wrong. People were queuing for an unusual delicacy: balls of butter, dipped in dough and cooked in a vat of boiling oil. Fried butter, in other words. The balls were dusted with a thin coat of powdered sugar. When bitten, they collapsed with an unctuous squelch. Fairs are known for their decadent snack offerings. Most are unhealthy, and some push the conceptual boundaries of food into new territory. The Los Angeles County Fair, which ended on October 4, featured a Meat Lovers' Ice Cream Cone (don't ask). The Minnesota State Fair is known for its foods-on-a-stick. The Texas fair bills itself as the fried food capital of the state. The claim is credible. Sprinkled between the pig races and carnival rides are vendors selling fried ribs, fried gua-

camole, fried ice cream and even fried bacon. Fried butter is a new development. At the beginning of the fair it won an award for creativity. The inventor, Abel Gonzales, won the same award in 2006 for a different recipe—fried Coke. Nutritionists would shudder at all the fat, sodium and trans fats. Defenders say that the key is moderation. 'If this is not your lifestyle, then it's OK to indulge once or twice a year,' says a spokeswoman for the fair. Opinions among fairgoers were divided. A woman selling toffee said that people had no business frying butter, with diabetes and high cholesterol as common as they are. She said she preferred to cook with olive oil. But a man eating a basket of fried butter with cherry jam was not too bothered. 'It's just butter,' he maintained." (The Economist, October 10)

STRAIGHT FLUSH

"Pacifica's local water company, North Coast County Water District (NCCWD), offers only a \$50 rebate for any new toilet that uses less water than the old ones. It will also rebate the cost of recycling the old toilet. Nevertheless, it is worth it to get a new HET toilet. We love ours." (Linda Corwin)

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

"But as former Nixon aide G. Gordon Liddy once told me (and he should know!), the problem with government conspiracies is that bureaucrats are incompetent and people can't keep their mouths shut. Complex conspiracies are difficult to pull off, and so many people want their quarter hour of fame that even the Men in Black couldn't squelch the squealers from spilling the beans. So there's a good chance that the more elaborate a conspiracy theory is, and the more people that would need to be involved, the less likely it is true. Why do people believe in highly improbable conspiracies? In previous columns I have provided partial answers, citing patternicity (the tendency to find meaningful patterns in random noise) and agenticity (the bent to believe the world is controlled by invisible intentional agents). Conspiracy theories connect the dots of random events into meaningful patterns and then infuse those patterns with intentional agency. Add to those propensities the confirmation bias (which seeks and finds confirmatory evidence for what we already believe) and the hindsight bias (which tailors after-the-fact

explanations to what we already know happened), and we have the foundation for conspiratorial cognition. Examples of these processes can be found in journalist Arthur Goldwag's marvelous new book, *Cults, Conspiracies, and Secret Societies*, which covers everything from the Freemasons, the Illuminati and the Bilderberg Group to black helicopters and the New World Order. "When something momentous happens, everything leading up to and away from the event seems momentous, too. Even the most trivial detail seems to glow with significance." ...What should we believe? Transcendentalists tend to believe that everything is interconnected and that all events happen for a reason. Empiricists tend to think that randomness and coincidence interact with the causal net of our world and that belief should depend on evidence for each individual claim. The problem for skepticism is that transcendentalism is intuitive; empiricism is not. Or as folk rock group Buffalo Springfield once intoned: Paranoia strikes deep. Into your life it will creep ..." (from Michael Shermer's Skeptic column in *Scientific American*, September 2009)

READ ONCE

"Mysteries, New York Times Bestsellers, Paperbacks in Excellent Condition. Most read only once. Waldport Flea Market" (classified ad in local shopper *Pacific Skinny*, Waldport, Oregon, October 8). A discerning buyer sure could tell if one of those books had been read TWICE!

TWIST OF LYME

I am pleased to report that my antibody test for Lyme disease was negative, as was my initial blood screen for the bacterium, and an infectious-disease specialist has cleared me for action. Bring on the swine flu, the West Nile virus, and the fact checkers!

SWAMI SEZ

"The wish to believe, even against evidence, fuels all the pseudosciences from astrology to creationism." (Isaac Asimov)

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