

April Program

The first ever Japan Suiseki Exhibition is in the record books but you will not want to miss this opportunity to see what it looked like in person. **Larry** took pictures and will share them with us at the **April 23rd** meeting.

One of the most famous suiseki was *Kurokamiyama*, Black Hair Mountain (below)



Mr Morimae shows Larry the lid for Black Hair Mountain, removing it from the glass case so it could be properly photographed.

Stone of the Month

Bet you were wondering when you could show off your treasures from our Yuha trip last month! This is it. We all want to see those beauties!

It is understood that some of us may not have time to have a *daiza* made so perhaps a *suiban* will work? Do the best you can....

Here's **Nina's** boat stone (10.5" w x 2.25" h x 4.5" d):



Mr. Richard Ota

It has been 5 years since we first printed the following:

Exciting News

In 1960 and 1967, **Richard Ota** wrote a couple of articles for the Japanese language newspaper, *Rafu Shimpo*. **Michiko Watanabe**, a friend and coworker of **Richard's**, translated those articles. We have permission to reprint them in our newsletter.

Richard tells us that he was among the first to bring suiseki to the U.S. and said that he took **John Naka** and **Harry Hiraio** up to the Kern River on Labor Day week end in 1961. It was **John** and **Harry's** first trip. **Harry** didn't bother to look for stones but rather preferred to fish and even caught one in his straw hat! Can you imagine our **Harry** not being interested in stones?

The wait is over. We have the translation. **Michiko Watanabe** wrote last month and said: "My interest in *suiseki* came from my boss (Mr. **Ota**) at work, who kindly shared his writing to a local newspaper many years ago and gave me all the JUSEKI magazines he had. My translation initially meant to address readers, my friends who are interested in the Japanese culture in general, most of them beginner to *suiseki*. So I have done my best collecting information to satisfy their needs.

You must not need such information because your audience are connoisseurs but I inserted pretty good amount of additional information to help my readers to better understand *suiseki*.

I've encountered many friends and enthusiasts who have supported my translation, among them were Mr. **Jim Greaves**, the Huntington docents, bonsai friends, and my ESL teacher. Their questions helped me to understand *suiseki* deeply.

I have made trips to the Japanese American National Museum, the only place that holds the old copies of *Rafu Shimpo*. I have had e-mail conversations with Mr. **Arishige Matsuura** also."

Turn to page 8 to begin reading Mr. **Ota's** translated work on *Suiseki Appreciation*.

~Larry Ragle

March Meeting Notes by Linda Gill

ANNOUNCEMENTS: We welcomed **Deborah** and **David** who were first time guests. We also welcomed the adult **David Fockens**, **Sharon Somerfeld's** nephew. He was a boy the last time we saw him.

We asked members who had been on the Yuha trip to please sign a release form for the film being produced by **Kristen Zethren** about hunting for stones. (See page 11)

STONE OF THE MONTH (first stones). The year the stone was found is in parenthesis. Sizes are in inches, width x height x depth

Larry met a man at **Harry Hirao's** house who had a body and fender repair shop he was selling. They talked about bondo and **Larry** said he would like to try it as a way of simplifying the process of making *daiza* fit the base of an uncut stone. He tried it on a stone he found near the Russian River in 1973.

No sooner had **Larry** stated that his stone (see below) has the first ever bondo *daiza* when **Jim Greaves** said he wanted it for the AVSRC, so **Larry** gave it to him. It's a piece of history. Talk about being a collector! (See program notes) **Jim** has it now.



Bill Hutchinson (1987)
3 x 5 x 3



Buzz Barry (2009)
4.5 x 8 x 2.5



Al Nelson (1995)
9 x 12 x 5



Larry Ragle (1973) 9 x 7 x 3



Richard Turner (2002) 9 x 5 x 9



Hanne Polvsen (1992) 10 x 9.5 x 8



Bruce McGinnis (1990) 7 x 5.5 x 4



Phuong Chau (2013) 10 x 5 x 6



Leif Schmit-Kallas (2013) 6.5 x 5.5 x 4



BJ Ledyard (2005) 4.5 x 4 x 3



Nina Ragle (1979) 5.5 x 3.5 x 4.5

The 1 inch wide inner margins are designed for use with a 3 hole punch.



March Program Notes *by Linda Gill*



The evening began with **Larry** informing new members and reminding old ones about the origin of Aiseki Kai. It was a rainy day in 1982 and **Harry Hirao** and **John Naka** were visiting expecting to talk about bonsai but the weather kept them inside so they talked about stones. **John** asked **Larry** to start a suiseki study group. Thus Aiseki Kai was born; it is not really a club so much as a dictatorship whose focus is the Japanese style of stone presentation. Then the program began:

Richard Turner was the moderator for the panel, which included **Jim Greaves**, **Don Kruger**, **Larry Ragle** and **Ann Horton**. The topic was The Nature of Collections and Collecting.

Richard preceded each question for the panelists with one or more quotes, some serious and some humorous, e.g., 'Collecting is an illness that should be covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act' (**Richard Matteucci**) and 'Eventually a collection ceases to be a personal indulgence and assumes its own identity. In fact, it becomes a thing in its own right—rather like Frankenstein's monster.' (**Howard Hodgkin**)

RT: What is a collection?

Don: The dictionary defines a collection as any group of items that meet a purpose. But the purpose doesn't have to be realized.

Jim: Focus distinguishes a collection from an accumulation. Collecting usually has a set of criteria. He also said that he and **Alice** were "totally certifiable".

Ann: She had no overriding purpose to her collecting; there were just stones that she couldn't leave behind – they spoke to her. They had no intrinsic value but were valuable to her. Her collection developed by default and is a shared interest with other stone collectors.

Larry: His platform was set by the Japanese traditions of stone collecting. We are mimicking them by using California stones that fit suiseki guidelines. Collecting is the best part for him – being out in nature – and finding a good stone helps.

Jim coined the word 'election' for an unfocused assemblage of good, but not necessarily related objects.

RT: Did you plan to collect from the start?

Jim: yes

Larry: yes

Don: unsure of answer

Ann: No, but humans are trained to judge and as you continue to collect you make more refined judgments.

RT: What is the nature of your collection? What are its strengths and weaknesses? When does your collection cease to be a group and become its own thing?

Larry: His collection is always open to new stones, either different or better than, what he already has. Sometimes it is a stone that you just like. In the 1980s he had a Japanese visitor who said that his stones would make a nice path but he feels that he has learned to choose better stones now. **Nina** added that their collection is huge.

Ann: Her stone choices are totally haphazard and too many. She does have a small subset of small stones in her house but she is not trying to build a collection. She is looking for stones that teach her.

Jim: He feels the Frankenstein quote is a weak analogy for his collection. He started in the 1980s to seek a broad selection of stones of exceptional quality. To that end he bought much of **Bob Watson's** collection because **Bob** was one of the first non-Japanese collectors. His stones are collected because of their historical or geographical value, intrinsic Japanese value or their teaching value, using all North American stones. He is now working on acquiring a collection of foreign stones. He loves to collect and his collection is 'beyond sanity'.

Don: He collects only North American, hand-held (up to 80 pounds) stones that are not cut. He follows the Korean and Japanese aesthetic for his displays and lack of focus is both the strength and weakness of his collection.

continued on page 7

Ask Guy Jim

Second part of last month’s overview of the Stone of Heaven, Visions of Earth – American Jade Viewing Stones exhibit:

As noted last month, jade commonly forms as a dense mass and is one of the hardest natural materials on earth. True Jade is not a unique substance. Most jade is intermixed with other minerals, including asbestos and especially serpentine. The name ‘jade’ is generic, signifying one of two distinct mineral aggregates of metamorphic rocks that are composed of different silicate minerals: **nephrite** and **jadeite**. (As we have previously noted, all but a few stones in the exhibit were nephrite.) Nephrite is much more common than jadeite (that is found in only a dozen or so locations around the world). California is unusual in that it hosts occurrences of both nephrite and jadeite within the same geographical locations – including both the Eel River area and Clear Creek in San Benito County.

In practice, beyond the theory and the scientist’s laboratory, correctly recognizing what is or is not jade is often mind-numbing guesswork. We are confronting the equivalent of a continuous cooking pot, a metamorphic stew of ingredients that have been heated, crushed, liquefied and cooled again and again while slowly journeying from the depths of central Pacific Ocean, crashing into and sliding under the Pacific Coast and finally rising and eroding into the mountain ranges of today.

Nephrite is of the amphibole group. It is a tightly interlocking fibrous variety of the actinolite-tremolite series and is not classified as a separate mineral species. Tremolite, a calcium-magnesium silicate, is usually white to gray. When part of the magnesium is replaced by varying amounts of iron, the mineral is termed actinolite and takes on a series of greenish tints, often within the same specimen.

Actinolite (fig. 1a), falling in the middle of the series, is a silky fibrous mineral that is actually one form of asbestos. The fibers are intertwined and matted into dense bundles in a random orientation; this structure gives nephrite an incredible toughness. Both

Fig. 1a - Jade Cove, California
 9 3/4" x 19 1/2" x 3 3/4"
 24.8cm x 49.5cm x 9.5cm
 This side has been interpreted as a breaching whale, a flame, and a hand; on its side it is shaped like a boar.



Fig. 1b - Side view during mock-up showing the thin lens formation.



Fig. 1c - Composed of botryoidal nephrite and darker serpentine this side is most often read as a mother and child.

nephrite and jadeite have higher compressive and tensile strengths than any other rock aggregate. The color of nephrite depends on the presence of other elements. As iron concentrations increase, the green darkens and to the point of being effectively black. Combinations of chromium and iron create an intense green color. Bright green flecks of chrome garnet or black magnetite may occur, but lower the gem value.

Jadeite is a sodium and aluminum silicate of the pyroxene group of minerals. The gem form of the mineral is a microcrystalline interlocking crystal matrix. Of the two jades, jadeite is more rare, being documented in fewer than 12 places world-wide, including both the Eel River area and Clear Creek in the Diablo Range of southern San Benito County (fig. 2). Both areas are among the few sites in the world where nephrite and jadeite are found adjacent to one another.



Fig. 2 - ‘Climbing Beyond the Bridge of Dreams’, Clear Creek, California
 7 1/8" x 9 3/8" x 3 3/8"
 18.1cm x 23.8cm x 8.6cm





Fig. 3a - 'Green Cloud Mountain' Jade Cove, CA
8" x 3 1/2" x 6 1/4" (20.3cm x 8.9cm x 15.9cm)



Fig. 3b - Detail of Green Cloud Mountain above

The West Coast is also home to two other rare forms of jade: **Botryoidal Nephrite Jade** (figs. 1c, 3a, 3b, 4, 5), named after its characteristic grape-like clusters of rounded bumps, the 'grapes' or 'bots' are most often opaque but pure translucent examples are



Fig. 4 - 'The Land Before Time' (detail) Jade Cove, CA
8 1/2" x 9 1/4" x 2" (21.6cm x 23.5cm x 5.1cm)



found in Jade Cove (fig. 3b) The second is the so-called **Vulcan or vulcanized jade** that has developed very rich, dark patinas through decomposition and the surface enrichment from iron (figs. 6, 7a, 7b, 8).

Fig. 5 - Non-representational Stone, Jade Cove, California
2 1/2" x 3 1/8" x 1" (6.4cm x 7.9cm x 2.5cm)



Fig. 6 - Mountain Stone Jade Cove, CA, Robert McKenzie
10 3/8" x 6 3/8" x 3 3/8" (26.4cm x 16.2cm x 8.6cm) Cut



Fig. 7a - Mountain Stone, Jade Cove, Robert McKenzie
10 3/8" x 3 1/4" x 4 7/8" (26.4cm x 8.3cm x 12.4cm)

Many of the stones we present as viewing stones do not fit preconceptions of 'jade'. Naturally weathered jade often develops multi-colored patinas or thick scabs or rinds that hide internal colors that may range from the typical green to white or black. Ironically, it is often the least 'jade-like' jade that provides viewing stones closer to Japanese prototypes. Jade is very resistant to physical fracturing and therefore seldom wears into multi-peaked mountain forms. The natural shapes in which jade



Fig. 7b - Reverse of the same stone displayed vertically as a cliff



Fig. 8 - Mariposa County, CA. Found and donated by Keith Olivas 12 1/4" x 11 1/2" x 5 1/4" (31.1cm x 29.2cm x 13.3cm) Coulterville or Mariposa Jade was seldom of high quality and is no longer being commercially mined. This exceptional 39.17 pound (17.76 Kg) solid mass of nephrite jade is almost completely covered by the iron-rich vulcanized rind, but you can see a deep 'jade' green still exposed across the top.





Fig. 9 - 'Cape San Martin' Cape San Martin, California, Keith Olivas 15 1/2" x 11 1/2" x 7 3/16" (39.4cm x 29.2cm x 18.3cm) Cut

frequently occurs tend to the extremes of rounded cobbles (lacking interesting variations of contour – see the large Mariposa boulder (fig. 8) or flattened lenses (fig. 1b) lacking sufficient thickness in depth to be considered true, balanced *suseki*. The most irregular shapes of jade are formed at the contact zones between jade and surrounding minerals, often serpentine (fig.9).

The jade in the exhibit came from a dozen collecting areas. I will mention each briefly, beginning by reviewing the sites where we took our examples of above:

Jade Cove / Big Sur, CA is the world famous site for jade in California and has been the source of vast quantities of high quality nephrite including rare botryoidal and vulcanized forms. While Jade Cove is a specific cove, the name is also used to refer to the general area along the Big Sur between Cape San Martin and Willow Creek in the south to just north of Jade Cove and Plaskett Point. Divers recovered most of the jade from coastal waters. Because the jade has been tumbled in the surf and sand it may be found with exceptionally high polished natural surfaces. Examples



Fig. 10 - The group display of jadeite viewing stones from Clear Creek



Fig. 11 - Mountain Stone. Clear Creek, California, Ken McLeod 10 3/4" x 4 1/8" x 4 1/8" (27.3cm x 10.5cm x 10.5cm) The stone is largely dark serpentine with light ridges formed by harder minerals of the jade continuum.

range in size from the infinitesimal to the colossal – the largest weighing 4 tons is on view at the Oakland Museum. The existence of jade along Big Sur was confirmed in 1936, but not actively exploited until 1947. Although not originally collected within our context of viewing stones, the jades included here that were collected by **Andrew Schmidt** (in the 1940s and 50s) (figs.1a, b, c) and **Ernie Porter** (figs. 3-5), in the 1950s and 60s, are among the first and remain among the best specimens of smaller pieces of jade ever found in the area of Big Sur. Many **Porter** stones once belonged to California Aiseki Kai club member **Everett Washburn**(figs. 4/5) however, he had purchased them as mineral specimens, not for the purpose of *suseki*. **Clear Creek, CA:** Clear Creek cuts the Diablo Range of southern San Benito County and is renown for its variety and complexity of the mineral wealth. Jadeite (figs.2, 10) was discovered there in 1936 and it remains one of the few sites in the world where nephrite and jadeite are found adjacent to one another. Neither occurrence is of high carving or gem quality. Most Clear Creek jade is intermixed with other minerals, including asbestos and especially serpentine (fig. 11). However, it is this very ordinariness and mélange of minerals that leads to irregular wearing down and decomposition that provide us with some of the more interesting viewing stones.

Our jade journey continues next month,

GuyJim

The views expressed in this column are personal, perhaps irreverent, irrelevant or just plain wrong and do not reflect the consensual view of California Aiseki Kai. Send your viewing stone questions (or comments) for GuyJim to jimreaves@roadrunner.com or 1018 Pacific Street, Unit D, Santa Monica, CA 90405 or call (310) 452-3680

Program Notes

continued from page 3

RT: How is your collection organized?

Larry: They are ‘just there’ in rooms, on shelves, and outside. There is no organization but he does know where any individual stone is located. **Nina** added that only stones with *daiza* are in the house and the rest are outside ‘being watered’ (a practice called *yoseki*).

Ann: It isn’t! The small stones are together in a display case and her hematites from New York are in a drawer.

Don: He has large plastic boxes with each small stone in an envelope with its picture and where and when it was found. Large stones are outside on shelves under his cantilevered garage. He too knows where each stone is. He has few stones in the house – no room – but will bring in a stone to study it.

Jim: He had large outside piles topped with a rock that told him the source of the stones but **Alice** used to move things in the garden and now he can’t recall many of their original locations. A large part of his collection is individually boxed with labels and pictures and stored in his apartment building where he has a studio for work and photography. He also has three 8’ x 20’ containers at the Huntington Gardens for stone storage. He keeps about 10 stones in his house that he changes regularly or to honor a guest; he also brings them in to study.

Richard quoted **Richard Faletti**, “Your motivation must always be to please yourself. Follow your intuition and collect what sings to you. The objects you acquire should give you pleasure and fellowship.”

RT: What are the personal rewards of viewing stones for you?

Ann: Stones are talismans that remind you of places and people. Good stones have a spirit and draw out your spirit. She recently bought a Chinese abstract stone and it is a master teacher for her; each time she views it she sees a new vista. The meaning of a stone may change each time you see it, whether it is 5 minutes or several years apart.

Larry: Being in nature–on the river. The hunt is what captured his attention. His stones often sit around after he gets them home. **Nina** said it is the thrill of the hunt, being in the moment.

Don: Studying stones has enriched his spiritual and philosophical growth and knowledge of eastern religions. It has also sharpened his artistic eye – seeing what is there and what is not. He is a voyager, not a collector. For viewing stones, phenomenology – the first reaction to a thing before thinking sets in - is a good thing. Your personal experiences cause you to relate to a thing/stone before your training comes in.

Jim: His goal is to give others a chance to experience the thing/a stone. That keeps him going. He sees ‘stones’ as a palette for so many aha moments; finding them in nature, re-finding them at home, finding their balance, the best cutting line, the best way to display them and more. There are so many immediate experiences working with stones which can be re-experienced over and over that lead to more learning.

Ann: **Jim** said it all; there is never an end.

Bill Hutchinson commented that each time he looks at a stone it makes him recollect where and when he picked up the stone.

Richard began the evening with this quote from **Harry Beran**: “They say that anything that either arouses or relaxes or induces fantasies can lead to addiction. Collecting does all three, and so is especially addictive.”

Richard’s final quote was from **Sigmund Freud**, “A collection to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be removed is, in fact, dead.”

Al Nelson read several lines written by **Jim** in an article published years ago about a stone from the Eel River. The ultimate comment about that, or any, stone was: “This ... stone transcends the concept of classification.”

Richard’s most relatable quote was, “Collecting is like eating peanuts, you just can’t stop.” (author unknown)



Suiseki Appreciation Series 1 ~ January 1, 1961

by Yuseki Sanjin*

[ED Note: 5 years ago, in our April 2009 newsletter, we printed a notice announcing that we would serialize two articles by **Richard Ota** that were published in *Rafu Shimpo*, a Japanese language newspaper, in 1961 and 1968. Mr. **Ota**'s friend, **Michiko Watanabe**, has now completed her translation making it available to us at this time.]

*Yuseki Sanjin, 遊石山人(a man who plays with stones) is the pen name of **Richard Ota**.

One day at work I found an upright stone standing in a planter with a silk tree. The stone was not anything extraordinary, but laying flat in my hand reminded me of a faraway mountain so I positioned it horizontally. On my next visit the stone was repositioned as it had been. The lady of the house who was a painter said, "This stone looks like a face of someone upright, so I corrected it. I suspect you played with the stone last week." This explains that the same stone appeals to individuals differently. It could be just a piece of rock to someone.

When I was asked to write about *suiseki* and how to appreciate it by the president of California Bonsai Society, **Morihei Furuya**, I felt ill at ease since *suiseki* was still foreign to me and even bonsai was new. It is said that you will truly appreciate *suiseki* only after you have savored bonsai thoroughly. I was encouraged that Mr. **Yoshio Naka** would come to my rescue with research materials but he has become increasingly busy lately. I feel as if I am a blind man who is not afraid of serpents charging me when I discuss *suiseki*. Therefore I am open to input from readers that might help us better understand *suiseki*.

Although *suiseki* is often mistaken for so called *bonseki*, they are not the same. I will later explain this aspect. First I would like you to know that *suiseki* is the correct term despite it once being called *bonseki*. *Suiseki* include natural stones in which you find nature as mountain scenes, the structure of an island and the waterfalls expressed with the white lines on the surface of the stone, for example, as well as rustic country huts, images of human faces or forms of fish and animals. They are viewed in a shallow container with water or sand, or sometimes with moss, or on a carved stand fitted directly beneath the stones.

Suiseki viewing seems a simple hobby but it takes a while to start appreciating it. They say you will appreciate *suiseki* thoroughly only after you understand calligraphy, paintings, antiques and bonsai very well. This is the reason why *suiseki* has been considered to be an ultimate hobby since early days. There is a joke that when you begin to enjoy *suiseki* half of your legs are in the coffin, meaning that *suiseki* has a long way to be truly appreciated just as the aesthetics *shibui* (subtle and austere simplicity) does.

On the other hand the gate for *suiseki* as a hobby is wide open because everyone will enjoy once in a while finding stones which look like a mountain or have an interesting shape. You may have a childhood memory of picking up seashells or unusual stones on beaches or bringing back some mysterious-looking rocks from the mountains and setting them on your desk. It could be a part of the Japanese disposition. I assume that a kind of yearning for nature is prehistorically imprinted in our mind. The beautiful stones seem to bring back primitive feelings stored in us Japanese in general. The aesthetic inspiration stirred by a stone picked up in the vast stone-field is similar to the act of appreciating nature where one picks wild flowers and views them in a vase or recreating art with old roots of trees, or making an object of art with abandoned old wheels.

Yet *suiseki* seems to have a profound connection to the idea of Zen. When did an appreciation of the beauty of stones start? How were they enchanted with *suiseki*?

During the Song dynasty (960–1279) in China it was written that the unusual and mysterious stones attracted the literati (scholars and artists), and in Ming dynasty (1368-1644) the pictorial record of stones, *So En Seki Hu*, 素園石譜* appeared for the first time. The literati in China had been fond of viewing stones but they preferred the stimulating and provocative rather than an expression of nature in landscape stones. But it has hardly been talked about stones in recent years in China. (Cultural Revolution in China, 1966-1977)

It's been said that about 500 years ago in the Ashikaga era (1338-1585) in Japan the hobby began around the same time when the first pictorial record of stones appeared in China. But lately the editor/founder of the magazine, *Bonsai*, 盆栽, **Norio Kobayashi**, told about *suiseki* appreciation by the Emperor **Go-Uda** (1274-1287) approximately another 100 years earlier in the Kamakura era (1192-1333). We can assume that it's been in Japan for more than 600 years. In the reign of Shogun **Yoshimasa Ashikaga** (1453-1473) the manner of *suiseki* was developed so far as to distinguish the way to perceive the stones, the way to categorize the stones, or the way to view the stones in a tray with



sand. They classified the style of presentation as formal, semi-formal and informal. This is discussed in Japan's oldest two volumes of books on *suiseki*, *Bon-Zan Higen*, 盆山秘言, (About Mountains Captured in Trays) published in April 1773. The books are currently owned by **Chikkyo Sui** of Japan.

Around the era from Kamakura to Ashikaga, Zen culture was in full swing influencing literature (ex. Gozan Bungaku, Zen based literature), painting (ex. Sesshu's black-ink landscapes) etc. The Shoguns and aristocrats often placed viewing stones in a tray with sand at the bottom or directly on a folded silk kerchief, *fukusa*, at a tea ceremony. The viewing stones continued to intrigue them even further through the period of wars, and in the Tokugawa era, a relatively peaceful time for over 250 years.

In the consecutive years from the Bunka (1804-1817) to Bunsei (1818-1828) period, *suiseki* became popular among the common people. There were some *suiseki*-maniacs. A paleontologist/mineralogist **Koshige Ki**(no)uchi known by his pen name, **Sekitei** or Stone Arbor published *Un Kon Shi*, 雲根誌, * Record of the Roots of Clouds, in 3 volumes containing 18 sections in the year 2 of the An-Ei period (1772-1780). He started to travel through Japan when he was 11 years old. At his 50's, he amassed 2,000 stones and described them in his books. He wrote in the foreword: The creativity of nature is infinite and mysterious. Two thousand distinctive stones are illustrated.

The historian **Sanyo Rai** * (1780-1832) was famous for his love of stones. He asked the female street vendors called *O-Hara-Me* from the area upstream Kamo River north of Kyoto to bring down as many kinds of stones as possible. He bought them up and enjoyed selecting good ones. The stones he didn't choose remained in his back yard and formed a small mountain. Many of his famous stones have been kept boxed with his autograph on them. It is said though that some counterfeits appeared in later years.

The two oldest distinctive stones are from the Ashikaga era. One was named 'Zan Setsu', 残雪, Lingered Snow, and it was handed down to the Shogun **Nobunaga Oda**. He exchanged the stone with the Ishiyama Castle (later 'Osaka Castle' owned by the next shogun, **Hideyoshi Toyotomi**). The stone was handed down again to the politically empowered Hongwanji Temple that belonged to the Osaka Castle and has been held as its valued treasure. Although some mention that it doesn't seem to have much value, it is nonetheless a historic stone which saw these two powerful shoguns.

The other is 'Suye-no-Matsuyama', 末の松山, Distant Mountain with Pine Grove). Once it belonged to Shogun **Yoshimasa Ashikaga**, and then to **Takatora Tohdoh**, next to the founder of Tokugawa era, Shogun **Iyeyasu Tokugawa** (1603-1605), and finally handed down to **Yorinobu Tokugawa**, the founder of the Tokugawa's Kishu branch family in Wakayama Prefecture now, and kept as his family treasure. It is said to be a weathered stone that is jet black and well polished from Nachi region in Wakayama, far south of Kyoto.

Yorinobu Tokugawa was famous for collecting stones from his own region. He protected certain areas near Tanabe today for stone hunting. He prohibited anyone from entering the bottom of the Furuya Gorge and made trips of exploration with his vassals. He used a gold-lacquered hoe for digging stones and quenched his thirst with water from a dried-gourd bottle he carried around his waist. The typical stones from this region are called *Furuya Ishi* and they were found collectively under ground. They were covered with thick layers of reddish soil. The glossy surface that looked like the polished black iron appeared after peeling off the soil. It is said that **Yorinobu** enjoyed stripping off the soil layers from the stone as if stripping the layers of kimono from a girl, a secret pleasure in which he might have indulged.

There was one more notable stone that remained as a treasure in the temple of the Daimyo (feudal chief), **Sadanobu Matsudaira*** in Tokugawa era. The 'Kurokami Yama', 黒髪山, Black Hair Mountain, is said to have been found by **Matsudaira** along the lake Chuzenji near Nikko and immediately offered to the Shogun **Tokugawa**. Now it is a treasure in Kan-Ei Ji temple in Uyeno, Tokyo. Including this one, the three famous stones are some of so-called *yuraiseki* which has clear lineage, that can be viewed today are shaped like mountains.

What are the other shapes/categories than mountain shaped stones? They are *Toyama Ishi* *Shimagata*, 遠山石島形, (island as a variation of a distant mountain), *Iwagata*, 岩瀉, (inlet) or *Araiso Dohkutsu*, 荒磯洞窟, (reef or cave), *Mizu Tamari Ishi*, 水溜り石, (stone with holes depicting lakes), *Dan Seki*, 段石, (terraced plateau) or *Kyuryo Seki*, 丘陵石, (hillside), *Doha*, 土八, (rolling hill preferably with a peak at an end), *Taki Ishi*, 瀧石, (waterfall) and *Kuzu Ya*, 茅舎, (hermit or thatched hut) or *Inaka Ya*, 田舎家, (deserted

farm house, often thatched). There are also forms of human, clouds, animals and birds or abstracts with unusual or mysterious shape.

I discussed how Ashikaga hobbyists enjoyed a stone's beauty in their time. The most effective and easy way to appreciate the stones is to lay a mountain-shaped stone on sand spread in a shallow tray. Once you wet the stone with a mister it reveals a mountain before dawn or one in the rain. Any *suiseki* stone looks the most beautiful when it is wet. You will contemplate during the time the stone slowly starts to dry. You are captivated by the gradation of color of the stone affected by the moisture. On the other hand, the completely dry stone evokes blue sky over the mountain. The stone viewed in the sunset will deliver a world totally different from any other.

Either the island stone or cave stone is viewed in a basin with either sand or water. Alternately, the stone is set on a thin carved wooden base called a *daiza* or, sometimes, *dai*. Also there is another way to display the mountain stone in a shallow container with moss representing the field at the foot of the mountain. My discussion so far extends to no more than the outline of *suiseki* and how they have been presented for viewing.

Then what is the intrinsic quality of *suiseki*? Since the introduction of 'Viewing Stones' to Japan in the Ashikaga era, they have been called by several different names; *bonseki*, 盆石, (stone depicting scenery in a tray), *gaseki*, 雅石, (stone of elegant beauty), as well as *suiseki*, 水石, (literally water and rocks, meaning scenery), joined later by *kiseki*, 奇石, (unusual stone) and *kaiseki*, 怪石, (mysterious stone) in the Tokugawa era up until now. The 1773 book, *Bon-Zan Higen*, explains that it is called *Bon Seki*, 盆石, when you see the stone as a statue and *Bon Yama*, 盆山, when you view the stone as a scenery.

Today there is a new genre called *bonkei*, 盆景, (scenery in a tray) which is a replica of certain scenery, commonly one of the most popular tourist destinations. When a scene near Suruga Bay includes the pine groves lined along the seashore, it has to have Mt. Fuji in the back. You have to bring in a stone which resembles the shape of the famous mountain. If you have difficulty finding the one in nature, you tend to chisel away the softer stone to look like the mountain and even paint the summit white to suggest the snow cap on it. They are positioned on a tray to express an attractive landscape. Colorfully and artificially created *bonkei* with stones being a part of the scenery have been mistaken for

naturally formed *bonseki* in that the stones are selected to be viewed alone. During this time of confusion, the word *suiseki* seemed to have emerged for the art of 'Viewing Stones' to distinguish *bonseki* that is a natural/single stone and evokes untouched nature from *bonkei* that is created scenery on a tray with often crafted stones. And the term *suiseki* has since become mainstream.

The authority on 'Viewing Stone', **Yoshiaki Chubachi** (pen name, Moss Stone), wrote in *Bonsai Geijutsu*, 盆栽芸術, (The Art of Bonsai): "The *Bonseki* portrays the scenery as substance, in other words, the scenery is viewed objectively. And yet the *Suiseki* doesn't simply depict substance. *Suiseki* renders subjective impression beyond nature with nature, stones. And the intention of the artist seems unseen as if his/her self is almost disappeared in the stone." These two different points of view reflect the art of 'Viewing Stone', distancing *bonseki* from *suiseki*. **Kenji Murata** describes the contrast of the two in his rare book,

Bonsai-Bachi To Suiseki, 盆栽鉢と水石, (Bonsai Pots and Suiseki) with *non-abstract* and *abstract*. It seems to me that appreciation of the stones as abstract (or non-substantial existence) is the ultimate stage where you are enchanted and obsessed by the art of *suiseki*. You may own the stage of the mind after exploring well through the world of *suiseki*. The stage will be evolved from subjective viewing. But pure subjectivity seldom exists since a slight objectiveness always penetrates your mind. That means when you see a stone as a mountain, your perception has already been influenced by an objective point of view. We realize that a general classification of the stones by scenes or things is an objective grouping of stones by forms.

With tentative analysis in mind, the practical step to enjoying a stone is to set one in a basin either with sand or water at the bottom. The sand or water is one of the devices. It should remind you of nature presenting its charm; the island should look like an island and the mountain should look like a mountain. There are some rules: The stone has to be absolutely natural (it shouldn't be altered by any means). It should not be painted. And it should not be a combination of two or more stones set or glued together. These rules technically separate *suiseki* from *bonseki*.

* * *

[Next month we will continue with **Richard Ota's** series *Suiseki Appreciation*. See footnotes on page 11, bottom.]



Hunting the Stone A film by Kristen Zethren ~ A new member of Aiseki Kai

Many years ago I made 16mm films for educational and business markets. I hadn't thought of making movies in years, until one day I was invited to a friend's house, and saw these smooth but ordinary rocks mounted on custom wood bases, displayed like precious artifacts. Fascinated, I learned that this was an arcane practice called *Suiseki* in Japan, or Stone Appreciation, which had migrated west to the States. I was put in contact with **Jim Greaves**, who in turn took me on some local hikes – he knew we wouldn't find *suiseki* quality stones in LA, but it was part of my initiation. Then I saw your show at the Huntington, and I was hooked. Last year I got a little funding and decided, why not make a documentary? Stone appreciation combines aesthetics, history, camaraderie, and the fun of going outdoors hunting for stones – “a treasure hunt for grownups,” one participant said. So far I've shot at the Huntington for historical and aesthetic background material and at the Yuha Desert for the Aiseki Kai annual stone hunt. After a several more locations I should have the footage needed to start

editing. Hopefully the little film will be good enough for PBS or some other outlet. Meanwhile, I'm enjoying the three stones I now have in my own collection: one I bought, which is very good; one a generous gift; and a smooth black plateau stone I collected all by myself at Yuha -- it may pass muster with Aiseki Kai!

(Two days later) I regret to say that my black plateau stone didn't pass muster with *suiseki* expert **Jim Greaves**. To be sure, the material was the right kind: black, hard metamorphic stone with softly weathered edges. But the form left something to be desired. And this brings me to a point that we newcomers may find somewhat discouraging: it takes time to develop *suiseki* connoisseurship. I thought my eye for art would make it a snap, but I didn't reckon on the need for a sharp detective's eye in the field. So with some study of historical texts and important stones, plus a little knowledge of geology, we'll all improve our chances to spot that terrific specimen, half buried, when we next go hunting the stone.

Footnotes for *Suiseki* Appreciation Series:

P 8 * **So En Seki Fu** 素園石譜 - *Su Yuan Stone*

Catalogue published by Lin Youlin in Ming dynasty (1368-1644) in China and selectively translated in English as *Scholars' Rocks in Ancient China*, by **Kemin Hu** in 2002.

P 9 * **Un Kon Shi** 雲根誌 (Record of the Roots of Clouds): Three volumes were published by Sekitei Ki(no)uchi from 1773 to 1779 in Japan. The legendary belief in early China that a cloud is born from among the rocks because the vapor changes to water drops when it touches the cold rocks. Thus the origin (root) of the cloud was believed to be rocks.

P 9 * **Sanyo Rai** 山陽類 (1780-1832): The Confucian and historian in late Edo period. He described the history of Japan from its origin to his time in Chinese in total 38 volumes.

P 9 * **Sadanobu Matsudaira** (1759-1829) named 'Kurokami Yama' 黒髪山 ('Case for the Black Hair Mountain': red lacquered container with the crest of Malvaceae design (the crest of Tokugawa clan) which has an autograph by **Raku-O Matsudaira**.)

[ED NOTE: The above mentioned *suiseki*, *Kurokami-yama*, appears on page one of this newsletter. Photograph by **Larry Ragle**.]

California Aiseki Kai meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Nakaoka Community Center located at 1670 W. 162nd St, Gardena, CA. Second floor. We do not meet in Nov-Dec.

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April Contributors: Linda Gill, Jim Greaves, Richard Ota (Michiko Watanabe) and Larry Ragle.
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We hope you will participate. Please send any submissions to ragle@cox.net no more than 10 days following our monthly meeting. Thank you!

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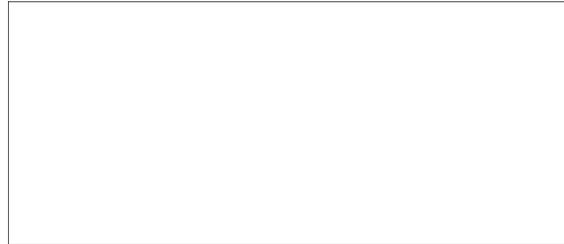
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Leaves no stone unturned

See our website:

aisekikai.com



Coming Events



There are 5 Wednesdays this month! Don't miss out on the fun. We meet on the 23rd!

ORANGE EMPIRE BONSAI SOCIETY

25th Annual Spring Garden Show, April 24-27, South Coast Plaza, 333 Bear St., Costa Mesa. Thurs-Sat 10-9, Sun 11-6:30. Free admission and free parking. Go for the bonsai, stay for the shopping! For more information, email **Dave Nadzam** at dnadzam@socal.rr.com or call him at 714.486.3728

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Suiseki-Viewing Stone Sale
stores.ebay.com/thestoneking

Always check Golden Statements Magazine
Calendar section for additional coming events



SAN DIEGO BONSAI CLUB

49th Annual Spring Show, April 26-27, Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room 101, San Diego. 10-5. Sales. Demos at 11 and 1. Free. For more info: bunjin54@yahoo.com



DESCANSO BONSAI SOCIETY

45th Annual Show, June 14-15, 1418 Descanso Drive, La Cañada/Flintridge. Sales. Admission to the exhibit is free with admission to Descanso Gardens (senior/students \$6). The club will host a reception on Saturday night, 6-7, raffle at 8.



Refreshments

Thank you **Harry Hirao, Jim Greaves, BJ Ledyard, Ann Horton and the Ragle**s for the March munchies. So good!

April appetite appeasers will be provided by **Ruby Oh, Bruce McGinnis and Buzz Barry.**

Three cheers for **Janet Shimizu and Phil Hogan**, our new refreshment people. Thank you so much!

