



April Program

Dr **Kathy Coffman** will present our program on April 25th. **Kathy** tells us that “the program will be on the 2006 Crespi Cup Bonsai and Suiseki show. I will include tips on judging stones as taught by **Chiara Padrini**. Also, there will be photographs of the stones from the show and from the collections of **Chiara Padrini** and **Andrea Schenone**. There will be some photographs of the places where we went collecting and some discussion of the geology of this area. I have included pictures of the best trees and the few bonsai pots that were entered in the competition. I will also include some details of the mouth watering menus we enjoyed on the trip, as inspiration to others who may want to go one day!”

Kathy will be moving to Cleveland, Ohio in May so we are lucky to get her before she goes.

Chiara Padrini is offering another suiseki vacation in Italy. All information is available on her web site: <http://www.padrini.it/vacanza07progren.htm>

Stone of the Month

How about something really fun? Figure stones! Don't forget that only landscape shapes can be shown in a *suiban* so these stones must be shown in a *daiza*. We will narrow the subject to just human shaped stones, *sugata-ishi*. **Covello/Yoshimura** suggest, “some of the most popular subjects for these stones are fisherman, farmers, maidens, Buddha, Kannon (goddess of mercy) and Buddhist monks”.



2 maidens and a monk.



Buried in a Landslide of Yugen Part 13

Yugen in Japanese art implies mysterious skills that can be felt but not put into words.
The Many Mysteries of Suiseki. Why Aiseki Kai?

This is the last of this series so it is about time I explained where I got the titles for this column. “Buried in a Landslide of Yugen” more or less describes the ongoing fallout of sharing our respect for these Japanese traditions with our members and other collectors of stones. Many mysteries remain.

“Why Aiseki Kai?” **Nina** and I started the study group in 1983 for one reason. To learn “what is a suiseki?” Up to that time, my interest was primarily bonsai. Learning from **John Naka** and **Harry Hirao**, it was very clear that bonsai was not merely a tree in a pot. Bonsai, as taught in Japan, was a passion involving art, religion and science. And both the art and the science were organized in a systematic array of requirements and responsibilities, established over the years, by the Japanese. When we got serious about collecting rocks we could have come up with names for the different shapes and colors all on our own, but we thought, “I bet that the Japanese have already done that sometime during the last 500 years”.

We began as a California Bonsai Society study group. CBS had an ongoing relationship with the L.A. Museum of Science and Industry. The museum hosted their meetings and the annual bonsai exhibition, but they were not accepting new groups seeking meeting space, so **John Naka** made us a part of CBS and we had our first home.

By the end of 1984 we had a clear mission for our group with a single goal; to learn what we could about the Japanese art of viewing stones. We had a foundation for growth based on the information presented at our meetings and available literature:

1. That a suiseki is but one type of viewing stone.
2. That the Japanese have elaborate classification systems denoting origin, shape, size, color, surface texture and when altering a stone is acceptable.
3. That along with the classification systems, there are specific methods for displaying a stone.
4. That some stones found on our west coast fit into this Japanese system. [Without guidelines, however, American innovation had already muddied the waters.]

March Meeting Notes

ANNOUNCEMENTS- Because **Larry** and **Nina** were not at the meeting, nor would they be available after ward to record any announcements at that meeting, there will not be any meeting notes this issue. We will try to catch up next month.

We assume that there were lots of beautiful Yuha Desert stones for our stone of the month. There were certainly some nice ones in the backpacks of our collectors!

Yuha Collecting Trip

Dateline: March 3-4. We had the most exceptional trip to the Yuha. After what looked like a rough start with more wind than we cared to handle, we made it to Dunaway. No more wind. We were 37 hunters, raring to go. Unfortunately, some did not heed the warning about the need for 4WD vehicles and our start was delayed while **Jim Peerson** and **Jack Dennis** pulled 3 cars out of the sand, repeatedly! Perhaps next time we will have an ultimatum about the necessity for 4WD vehicles. No joke.



Stuck in the sand

Once we made it to the collection site, everyone spent the next 4 hours in heaven. The weather was perfect and so was the rock hunting. At the end of day one, we regrouped poolside for a lavish party, potluck style, the centerpiece of which was Jack and Sachiko's classic chili and a yummy white chili. Thank you both and all the other food donors!

The next morning we went out again to greet another perfect day... lots of stones for everyone. Only the 4WDdrivers went to the second spot, a wash we will have to revisit! It was excellent. [Heed the warning, only 4WD need apply.]



The party epitomized the camaraderie for which Aiseki Kai is known. →

Almost everyone got in the group picture. ↓



Chieko Shimazu, hut stone



Hanne Povlsen, shelter stone or condominium?



Kathy Benson, bear shaped stone
Below: Bloomer's cache



Sharon Sommerfeld, tree or overhanging cliff?



We were all dog-tired by the end of the day.



Taka



Janet with her finds & Marge with hers ↓



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



March Program Notes *by Jack Dennis*

Editors note: This newsletter is being prepared well before the March meeting which we cannot attend as we will be out of the country. Thank you, **Jack**, for providing us with your program notes even before you presented your program! We assume that it all went as planned.

I began my presentation by making a disclaimer to the effect that the view points that I will make constitutes my own opinion and perspective regarding the nature of the art and its complex interpretation that is deeply rooted in Oriental religion, Zen, philosophy and culture. I also recognized that my ideas on the classification of stones may be viewed in the eyes of some to be an oversimplification of a very complex and ancient art.

I reviewed the high points of my lecture that I made to the Iowa Bonsai Association (IBA) in June of last year by noting that I completed the IBA presentation in a 3 hour period which included 171 slides, a critique of 9 Dennis family stones on informal display and also several stones from members of the IBA. After a brief introduction to the art of viewing stones I explained each separate classification hierarchy with stone examples as they were projected for each classification, commonly used categories, and some subcategories. Sample stone images from the Kobayashi Museum, Taikan Ten, Aiseki Kai exhibitions, Korean exhibitions, but mostly from our own collection were projected and discussed. The presentation was designed to answer the following questions about Decorative viewing stones (Kazari Keshiki-ishi) in the Japanese aesthetic, custom, and tradition:

1. What are they?
2. Why do we collect them?
3. Are we Westerners making ‘too much’ out of the need or requirement for the classification of stones?
4. Do we need a new American System of classifying stones that are unique to the American Landscape?
5. What is the classification of a stone that suggests a scenic landscape in every respect but doesn’t meet one or more of the technical criteria for size, color, texture, degree of hardness or has been altered in some way?
6. Why is the proper display of stones considered so important?
7. How many Kazari Keshiki-ishi are enough?

The answer ‘according to Jack’ to each question was stated and explained. I ended the IBA synopsis by projecting a slide titled “The Beauty is in the Stone to be Brought to Life in Your Imagination.”

The rest of the story: If you find a stone and you like it but it doesn’t conform to any technical criteria, as it may remind you of a happy time in your life or gives you peace of mind for a reason you can’t even explain

or makes your morning tea taste better then keep it – it is your spirit, your treasure and yours alone – enjoy!

Shifting gears from reverse (IBA presentation) to fast forward (this evening) I made a point to define two key hyphenated Japanese terms that are not defined in the Japanese/English/Japanese dictionaries: *sui-seki* and *bi-seki*, the correct comprehension of which I feel is critical to the understanding of my classification system.

I then answered the question: What is the Decorative Viewing Stone classification system? It was described as a method to organize stones to maximize efficient cataloguing and to provide a structure to facilitate the common understanding of the technical criteria of stone identification in the Japanese aesthetic. Some examples of why this is necessary were given. The system according to Jack is: *suiseki* (scenic vista stones), *buttai keisho-seki* (object shaped stones), *shomen mo’yo-seki* (surface pattern stones), *chusho-seki* (abstract stones), *shikisai-seki* (stones of color).

The common and binding thread between all classifications was delineated to be that the stones should be ‘as nature made them’ and not be artificial or created by people in whole or in part so that the respective suggestive power of the stones is not lost or interfered with which is at the core and essence of the art. My theory is that any stone that can be described in the Japanese language can fit in one of these classifications including stones of the American Southwest so there is no need to develop a new American system. I talked about the difficulties in the preparation of the guide in terms of language noting the elite beginnings of the art in Japan that was created by classical scholars, poets, nobility, wealthy merchants, and monks which the participation in was not a part of common everyday life in Japan. Over the elongated period of time since the introduction of stone appreciation to Japan many words have faded out of use at all levels of society and many others added. I think (always a danger), when combined with regional and class differences in the language, the changes in the language that have taken place over time has contributed greatly to the various interpretations of the words in contemporary use to describe stones by the multitude of authors writing on the subject.

I ended the program with words to the following effect: Human life is sometimes like that of the proverbial turtle – to make progress even slowly you must stick your neck and head out. The problem is, especially if you are a turtle, that in the least you run the risk of getting it stepped on and you just might get it removed by a superior in the food chain. An old adage in business, however, is that the greatest risk is no risk at all. The turtle that keeps his head retracted all the time will starve to death.

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Ask GuyJim

Dear GuyJim,

While visiting a rock shop I discovered some crystals that look like delicate flowers. Would really good examples be acceptable in our exhibit?

Desert Rosie

Dear Rosie,

Crystals and mostly crystalline stones are not considered to be acceptable for *suseki*, even *biseki*. In China, where approaches are more fluid, they are sometimes found under the umbrella of *gongshi*. Some classic Chinese stone types, such as *Xuan* stones and *Kunshan* stones, appear to have a significant crystalline component.

Rock shops often carry crystals that can superficially mimic flower forms. Asicular crystals have needle-like forms that radiate out in the manner of chrysanthemums or the puffed heads of dandelion seeds. The desert roses of your namesake come in two common types. Selenite crystals of gypsum tend to form irregular clusters of delicate flower petals that sometimes suggest smaller tea roses. Barite crystals can take superficially indistinguishable forms, but the more familiar barite roses are generally larger and tend to appear in the form of compact, broad-petal roses, or actually, camellias. They are often more stone-like, looking much like reddish-brown concretions or sandstone. Note that one does encounter examples of desert roses illustrated in the Japanese *suseki* magazines of the 1970's and the 1980's, but that still does not make them *suseki*.



The Desert Rose on the left is a typical barite formation while the more delicate crystalline type on the right may be created by both barite and selenite (gypsum).

To be honest, I must plead guilty to considering the use of desert roses in conjunction with a multi-stone thematic display and probably will do so at some time in the future. In that case, the desert rose might be better considered as an accessory accent piece that happens to have a mineralogical origin, rather than as an independent viewing stone. But, some might consider it arbitrary to distinguish between a naturally formed concretion and a stone of similar appearance created by another geological process.

Can crystals ever be used as actual viewing stones? Perhaps – I have to say ‘perhaps’ because we have several! Members who attend the meetings may recall that **Alice** and I have shown several examples of the selenite form of gypsum from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Some of our pieces are fine mineral specimens exhibiting large, transparent



Steuben Sparrow – A Gypsum (selenite) crystal recovered from Bras d'Or Lake, Cape Breton

monoclinic plates that have cleaved into folia. My ‘justification’ for dangling them within the context of viewing stones, if not true *suseki*, was that we collected them from beneath the water along a wave washed coast, thus their final form was shaped by post-crystallization forces of abrasion and dissolution.

Perhaps this imprint of environmental aging and modification by secondary forces may hold for other odd crystals as well. And, getting back to your crystal flowers, I have seen examples of ventifacted asicular crystals from the Gobi Desert that have presented nearly perfect flower images. Would/could these be used as *biseki*? That decision may have to wait until I get one!

GuyJim

More of **GuyJim's** Suibanics:

Biseki (1) A beautiful stone which fits no particular classification (2) a worked stone.

Bisexi-ishi (1) A stone with both deep invagination and a prominent peak (2) A very confused stone, often a metamorphic rock or less commonly a conglomerate.

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 jimgreaves@adelphia.net or 1018 Pacific Street, Unit D, Santa Monica, CA 90405 (310) 452-3680

Our Show

We had a very successful show this year. Here are the last of the pictures we have from that event:



Jack Dennis' Indian blanket stone



Jim Barrett's display



Lois Hutchinson's pattern stone



Sarah Gyer and her display of animal shaped stones



Larry Ragle's dry waterfall



Don Kruger's pattern stone



Another partial look at our show



Partial look at our show



Bill Hutchinson's animal shaped stone

AN INTRODUCTORY PERSPECTIVE ON THE ORIENTAL ART OF VIEWING STONES

by Jack Dennis

Most, if not all, viewing stone aficionados fostered their interest in decorative stones as they developed their creative skill and passion for miniature trees; bonsai (Japanese) and *penjing* (Chinese) or any of the other unique Asian styles. The sculpted trees and the stones are both works of art that depict nature in miniature and are complimentary and mutually supporting in both formal and informal displays. If you are training trees to become bonsai in the Japanese tradition then your interest in viewing stones will surely be *suiseki*, if you are training trees in the *penjing* style then your interest will likely be in *gonshi* (known in the west as Chinese Scholars Stones or more aptly in China as Spirit stones). The basic philosophy between the different styles and forms is essentially the same but it is in the custom and traditions of each country and their manner of display that is dissimilar and hence the practice of the art is therefore distinctive in each oriental society. It doesn't matter which particular stone aesthetic that you choose to practice, the stones will not fail to spark your imagination if you let them and give you countless hours of exhilarating enjoyment, visual contemplation and meditation.

In the beginning an inspiring collector will tend towards the big, bold, and the beautiful. Beautiful meaning: colorful, exotic or carved specimens either natural or as they may be engineered. As that person's knowledge matures the tendency moves more to the natural, simple, subdued and humble. It has been said that all good art is abstract and so it is with viewing stones formed by the natural forces of nature.

In the ideal aesthetic the stones are naturally formed and selected for their suggestive power (shape), balance, color, and texture. The beauty of a viewing stone is derived, in the main, from its magical power to bring to mind a panorama or a subset of the natural history that is resident in ones visual experience such as distant mountains, water falls, islands, animals and thatched farm houses or fisherman's huts and through these associations they remind us of scenes or experiences in our lives that in many cases are unique to a person's peculiar awareness.

Those of us who have become admirers of viewing stones for whatever mystifying cause discover a peaceful world of calm, instinctive insight, harmony and seclusion in viewing their stones and ultimately find direct communion with nature which is life as it is practiced in Zen Buddhism. There is this spiritual connection that we all find in our stones. The stones that we collect are suggestions of our experience in life and they speak to us as the embodiment of our own spirit.

My wife and I have purchased several beautiful *gonshi* and *suiseki* but without a doubt we enjoy the ones we found ourselves the best. Each stone evokes a message that often times we can not quite explain but it surely is akin to reverence. Every stone tells a story not only of its own assembly and creation in the geologic sense but also in the imagination of the viewer – that story is but a fragment of the viewers emotional sensitivity as it may be resident in his/her experience and therefore in the heart, soul, and spirit of his/her stone.

A viewing stone is an artistic expression that is a holder of energy and strength that will speak for its self but it has to be interpreted on an individual basis. A stone qualifies as a viewing stone if it possesses character that leads the owner to imagine a scene of composed natural majesty and to enter an area of emotional retreat, calm and tranquility. A stone appeals to an individuals sense of admiration perhaps only to those who understand its propensity, so, the owner's perspective should always be appreciated and respected. The important thing is what a particular stone means to you. After all the spirit in the stone is not that of a deity or some other divine being but it is your soul that is in the stone and, therefore, what it says to you is what counts. Chances are that only you will be able to see or hear the story that your stone has to tell and in many cases you will find it difficult if not impossible to see what others may see in their stones. After all, your experiences in life have been unique only to you and theirs only to them. The stones seem to remind us of happy times and seldom, if ever, remind us of the opposite. If they did we would soon get rid of them.

To be sure you will experience immense elation in discovering among the innumerable commonplace stones a priceless stone that you can take pleasure in forever. A good viewing stone is difficult to discover, but if you protract the exploration you will surely be compensated. You will find in the process of the search that an understanding of viewing stone philosophy and practice will bring a new awareness of the natural things around you. Many of those who collect stones also enjoy other outdoor activities such as gardening, mountain climbing, fishing, hiking, or exploring. Armed with an understanding and knowledge of the technical aspects of the art a person will never view nature quite the same way again.

My recommendation is that you keep a chronicle of your finds to record your thoughts and the story the stone speaks to you as soon after you find it as you can. This record will help you to live on in your stones after

Program notes

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I distributed a handout which included, among other things, a copy of my 'Basic Classification Guide' in diagram format that I have prepared to assist in cataloguing the stones in the **Dennis** family chronicle and logbook. Yes, I know, folks, my neck is stretched way out and I will appreciate your support. Adios Amigos!



Perspective

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you are gone. Your heirs will have something to read about you and your stones that you brought to life in your imagination. In this way you will live on in your stones. After all, their experiences in life are going to be different than yours and they will find it difficult to see what you saw in many if not all of your stones. It is our hope that you all will collect some beautiful viewing stones in high spirit; enjoy many contemplative moments to follow with happy trails in the process!

This article was written for and was published in the Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter 'IBA NEWS AND MUSE' OCTOBER 2005 VOLUME 22 ISSUE 10. Thank you, Jack, for sharing it with us.

Refreshments

Thank you **Joe James, Linda Gill** and **Sachiko Dennis** for our treats in March.



For April, **Lois Hutchinson, Nina Ragle, Al Nelson** and **Barry Josephson** will set the table for our break.

Buried in a Landslide...

continued from page 1

If we were to keep our focus on the Japanese guide lines we would never: 1. Glue two or more rocks together. 2. Place more than one rock in a *suiban* or in the same *daiza*. 3. Paint a rock with a sealer. 4. Lower or change what we knew at the time were basic standards for the Japanese art because they were too difficult to achieve. 5. Change their terminology to our liking. 6. Never use the term "American Suiseki" since it is the quality, shape and size of the stone that defines a suiseki, not where it was found.

1984 was a year of firsts that would define our group beyond the original intent. **Covello** and **Yoshimura's** book hit the shelves. We participated in our first public show at the Long Beach Convention Center as part of **Toy** and **Yuzy Sato's** gem club's display. We learned more about stones from our member's programs. We had our first holiday party. But most important, we chose our name. California Aiseki Kai was chosen by majority vote from several anonymous submissions. It turned out that **Toy Sato** was the author.

Next month begins **Ray Yeager's** series: Suiseki before Aiseki Kai.

Larry Ragle

ORIENTAL STYLE SCROLLS

These lovely scrolls are suitable for suiseki, bonsai, penjing and tokonoma display

SusanneBarrymoreScrolls.com

Susanne Barrymore
33 San Marcos Trout Club
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
(805) 967-4439
sbscrolls@yahoo.com

Contact People

Programs: Larry Ragle	949.497.5626	cfsmail@cox.net
Treasury/Membership: Nina Ragle	949.497.5626	ragle@cox.net
Annual Exhibit: Jim Greaves	310.452.3680	jimgreaves@adelphia.net
Exhibit Set Up: Marge Blasingame	626.579.0420	blasmrjr@aol.com
Refreshments: Lois Hutchinson	714.964.6973	whutch70@surfside.net
Historian: Ray Yeager	760.365.7897	ryeager890@aol.com
Webmaster: Bill Hutchinson	714.964.6973	hutch@aisekikai.com
Newsletter: Larry and Nina Ragle	949.497.5626	ragle@cox.net



Newsletter Committee

April Contributing Editors: Jack Dennis, Jim Greaves, Larry Ragle.
Mailing: Flash Partch
Editor: Nina Ragle

We hope you will participate. Please send any submissions to ragle@cox.net no more than 10 days following our monthly meeting. Thank you!

**Ragle
P.O. Box 4975
Laguna Beach CA 92652**

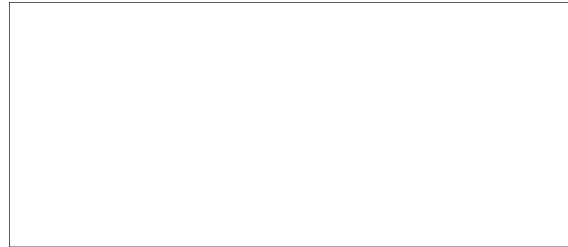
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



In Our 25th Year

Leaves no stone unturned

aisekikai.com



Coming Events

RUTH & SHERMAN LEE INSTITUTE for JAPANESE ART

7th Annual Spring Festival, April 22, Clark Center, 15770 Tenth Ave, Hanford. 10-5. Bonsai demo: **Kenji Miyata**. Workshops, exhibit, auction, sales.

SAN DIEGO BONSAI CLUB

42nd Annual Spring Bonsai Show will be held April 28-29. Casa Del Prado, Room 101, Balboa Park, San Diego. 10-5. Sales. Demos 11:00 am and 2:00 pm each day. Free admission and parking. For information: **Joanie Berkwitz** 760-431-1014

DAI ICHI BONSAI KAI

21st Annual Bonsai Exhibit, "Serenity Through Bonsai". May 5-6, Nakaoka Center, [address below] 10-4. Sat. at 10:30, beginners workshop. Demos at 1:00 both days. Info: **Andrea Wagner** 310.370.5492

SANSUI KAI OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Annual Bonsai Show, May 5-6, Sepulveda Garden Center, 16633 Magnolia Blvd., Encino. Free. Sales. Info: 818.776.0813

SAN PU KAI

Annual Spring Show, May 20, Japanese Cultural Center. 150 Cedar Road, Vista. 10-4. Sales. Info: **Joanie** 760.431.1014 or go the their web site: sanpukai.org

CALIFORNIA BONSAI SOCIETY

The Golden Anniversary Show and Convention, May 31-June 3 Crowne Plaza Anaheim Resort, 1202 Harbor Blvd, Anaheim/Garden Grove. Featured demonstrators will be **Hiroshi Takeyama**, Chairman, Nippon Bonsai Association, and **Hirotoishi Saito**, internationally known teacher. For more information, call registrar **May McNey** 714.738.0879 or email **Lindsay Shiba** ljshiba@juno.com. Hotel: 866.888.8891. For even more information see their website: california-bonsai-society.org.

GOLDEN STATE BONSAI FEDERATION

Convention XXX, "Bonsai Buccaneers" Oct 31-Nov 4, Crowne Plaza Anaheim Resort, 1202 Harbor Blvd, Anaheim/ Garden Grove. **Kunio Kobayashi** from Japan along with **Warren Hill**, **Kathy Shaner** and **Pedro Morales**. Collecting trips, vendors galore, workshops, exhibits including a suiseki display and raffle. For more information, please see their website: gsbfcconvention2007.com



CA Aiseki Kai meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Nakaoka Community Center located at 1700 162nd St, Gardena, CA. Second floor.