

Spieden Island

AKA "Safari Island"



Physical Description:

Spieden Island is located less than a mile north of San Juan Island. It is 2.6 miles long, a half-mile wide at its widest, and 374 feet above sea level at its highest. At the east end is Green Point. A private marina and boathouse are located on the south shore about 300 yards west of Green Point. At the west end of the island is Spieden Bluff.

The long south-facing side of the island is unusually barren of trees, consisting mostly of open grassy meadows with a few Gary Oaks here and there, and the odd fir tree. In several places, the sloping banks are littered with large granite rocks and boulders called "glacial erratics", deposited when the last of the glacial ice receded 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. By contrast, the north side of the island is steep, rocky and heavily forested.

A windsock and large aircraft hanger, which are visible when standing off the south central shore, are helpful in locating the island's runway. A two-story brick building and several wood frame buildings are also visible from this vantage point.

History:

Spieden Island Time line:

Circa 1878 -- Robert Smith, a former British soldier stationed at the San Juan Island British Camp, with his native wife, Lucy, took up residence on Spieden Island. In 1886 he received his patent for the island. Robert and Lucy had a daughter named Mary. While Mary was still a young girl, Robert died and Lucy subsequently remarried and moved, with her new husband, to Stuart Island. Mary and her native grandmother stayed on the family property on Spieden Island.

Early 1890s -- Edward Chevalier, who worked in the cooperage at the McMillan Lime Works, encountered Mary Smith, was infatuated, and they were married in 1894.

Mid 1890s to Early 1940s -- Ed and Mary Chevalier resided on Spieden Island, raising a family of five children: William, Alfred, Ellen, Elmer and Caroline. During this time, other settlers also lived on Spieden Island. There was a retired newspaperman, E. T. Vernon, followed later by a Russian named Anton Cepas and his family. The Chevaliers eventually bought out the Cepas' and were alone on the island thereafter.

1941 -- The Chevaliers (Ed, allegedly without Mary's consent) sold the island to a woman named Nelson (according to county records).

1943 -- Anthony "Tony" Sulak, who was, based on magazine and newspaper articles, an inventor and big game hunter, purchased Spieden Island.

1969 – The Spieden Development Corporation purchased the island for \$675,000. This was a project of Bert, Chris and Gene Klineburger, owners of the Jonas Brothers Taxidermy of Seattle, a large taxidermist and safari travel agent business (the Klineburgers purchased the business in 1954 but had retained the Jonas Brothers name). Their plan was to create “Safari Island”, a combined game farm, resort and shooting preserve. They stocked the island with 2,100 game birds and hundreds of rare animals. There was considerable local discontent about the business but the outrage went national after a November 1970 CBS Evening News feature, anchored by Walter Cronkite. In this broadcast, the trophy hunting was allegedly falsely portrayed but the uproar that followed marked the beginning of the end of Safari Island.

Circa mid-1970s – Alaska Northwest Properties Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Alaska Airlines, purchased Spieden Island, as an investment property.

November, 1996 to Present – James Jannard, founder and major owner of Oakley Sunglasses, through a shell company named “Under the Radar Inc.”, purchased Spieden Island for approximately \$22 million in cash and other properties. Under the Radar wanted to retain an “open space” tax designation, which allows for a lower tax rate if the land remains undeveloped. (Note: In 2007, Jannard sold his interest in Oakley for \$2.2 billion. He presently resides in California where he leads his new company, Red, which develops and markets extremely high end video cameras)

Wildlife:

In addition to the usual assortment of harbor seals, eagles and other native wildlife seen along the slopes and shores of Spieden Island, one can often spot very unexpected “exotic” species, remnants of the “Safari Island” episode circa 1970. These include:

Mouflon Sheep, a popular big game species, are relatives of Big Horn Sheep. The species originated on the islands of Corsica, Sardina, and Cyprus, but it has been introduced around the world as a game animal. The males and females have horns, but those of the males are larger. The curved, spiral horns are usually around 25 inches in length and are arched back over its head. The size of a male mouflon's horns determine his status in the group. (Source: <http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/mouflon.htm>)

Of the three exotic species regularly seen on Spieden Island, the Mouflon Sheep appear to be the most successful and most numerous.

European Fallow Deer are also a popular game animal which have been kept in game parks for hunting purposes almost from the time of the Romans. Medium sized, thin, and rangy, fallow deer are slightly larger than a domestic goat. They have several varieties of coat colors from deep chestnut to almost white, with white spots in the summer that darken to grey in the winter. Males develop impressive palmated antlers, used as a display to attract female and to repel other bucks during the mating season. The antlers are shed in March or April. The life span is around 12–16 years. (Source: http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/fallow_deer.htm)

Sika Deer, originally natives of Southeast Asia, are a popular game species distributed throughout the world. The color of the coat ranges from grayish or chestnut brown to reddish olive, with the chin, belly, and throat being off-white. Some sub species have white spots on their upper sides. (Source: http://www.ultimateungulate.com/artiodactyla/cervus_nippon.html)

These animals are usually active from dusk to dawn, which might explain why they are the least likely “exotic” to be regularly seen on Spieden Island.

Fun Facts:

- “In the early 1980s, Spieden caretakers decided to save some of the 300 animals imported when the island was a game preserve. They flew 100 volunteers (including Jo [the co-author]), to Spieden from San Juan Island to help in a ‘round-up’”. “. . . by the time the volunteers had ‘swept’ the entire three mile length of the island by a human hand-held chain, only one deer was in the corral.” (Source: “Gunkholing in the San Juan Islands”, By Jo Bailey and Carl Nyberg)
- “The Klineburger brothers began stocking their new property (Safari Island) with 2,100 game birds (quail, ring neck pheasants, guinea fowl, chukar partridge, jungle fowl and wild turkeys). Hundreds of rare animals—African Barbary sheep, Indian black buck, Corsican mouflons, Spanish goats, Indian spotted deer, Japanese sika deer, hybrid four-horned sheep and European fallow deer—were brought to the island. Some came from Chris Klineburger's ranch in Redmond, Wash. Others were purchased in Texas, where game raising is a sizable business.” (Source: “Sports Illustrated”, May 5, 1971)
- **WEIRD AND UNDOCUMENTED** things we have heard or read about Spieden Island:
 - Safaris Island’s investors included Eddie Bauer, John Wayne and other notables
 - Alaska Airlines bought the island as a rest stop for pilots and crew
 - Alaska Airlines hired hunters to kill all the animals
 - Alaska Airlines went bankrupt, making it possible for James Jennard to purchase the island for \$40,000,000
 - The island is the site of a “doomsday” shelter, with seven years of food and supplies
 - Lions and Tigers were included in the game animals released on the island

Sources:

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“Another billionaire for San Juans' Moolah Archipelago”, Puget Sound Business Journal, February 14, 1997

“Island Commuter”, Popular Mechanics, November, 1950 (regarding Tony Sulak)

“Polar Bear Hunt Ends in Tragedy”, Tri-City Herald, March 27, 1958 (regarding Tony Sulak)

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