

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Prince Philip loved informality of the desert

Royal visitor said he enjoyed 'every minute' of time spent in California

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"The table was set with Royal Copenhagen's Flora Danica china and pale green place mats shaped like cabbage roses. The flatware was Georg Jensen's cactus pattern, with a variety of Baccarat crystal glassware," reported Palm Springs Life magazine. Mrs. Walter Annenberg had created centerpieces for the table for the special luncheon in February 1983 with Boehm Porcelain flowers and Flora Danica tureens in a nod to the fine china that was also used in the English royal household.

The prior September, the Annenbergs had learned of a planned visit to California by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Walter Annenberg immediately wrote to the Queen's private secretary inviting the royal couple to Sunnylands, his palatial home in Rancho Mirage. Annenberg had been in London as the ambassador to the Court of St. James's, and his invitation was accepted. The Washington Post reached Mrs. Annenberg by phone for an interview, "'We're anxious to show them our home in the desert and all the mementoes of our five-and-a-half years in Great Britain.' ...Asked if she had entertained any other queens at Sunnylands, she replied, 'What other queens do I know?'"

The royal yacht Britannia steamed through the Panama Canal and landed in San Diego where the couple boarded Air Force Two for the short trip to Palm Springs, and to lunch. Former President Gerald Ford and former First Lady Betty Ford were in attendance. "The main course was a rack of lamb, served with string beans, glazed carrots, and potatoes parisienne...paired with a 1966 Château Lafite Rothschild."

The Queen noticed the deft table settings and famously quipped that both she and the Annenbergs had the same china, "only the Annenbergs had more of it."

After luncheon the royal party hopped back to San Diego and to the remainder of their trip sailing up the coast of California, that would include a visit to another friend of Annenberg's, the sitting President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, at his ranch above Santa Barbara.

The visit to the desert had been very brief, hardly fulfilling the sentiments of Prince Phillip from a visit nearly two decades prior in 1966 when the Desert Sun headline read, "Gets Full Red Carpet—Prince Philip Loves Desert, Expresses Desire to Return."



Montie Montana and His Royal Highness Prince Philip ride western-style to polo match at Eldorado 1966.

COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

"His Royal Highness Prince Philip of Great Britain came to the desert. He saw, briefly, and he conquered. In turn, the desert won the royal visitor. Prince Philip... was taken and impressed with the desert, and the warmth, friendliness and hospitality of its people. The Duke had a formal welcome, a brief press conference, spent Saturday night quietly, enjoyed a poolside barbecue, Sunday lunch time (dressed apropos the occasion in a sport shirt with Caribbean Island design), and spent more pleasant time watching his favorite sport, polo, in the afternoon. And he ended a 'thoroughly enjoyable' weekend by calling on and chatting a while with former President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the retired general's Eldorado Country Club home. The husband of England's Queen Elizabeth II is known for his love of informality. This he experienced during his...visit."

Prince Philip made his only public appearance of the excursion at Eldorado Polo Club for a match between California and Sonora, Mexico sponsored by the Pathfinders as a benefit for Variety Clubs International and the Palm Springs Boys Club. The Mexican team beat the Californians 12-3. Philip was quoted as saying he "loved every minute" of his weekend from the moment he landed at Palm Springs airport at the controls

of a British Andover turbo jet to the time he took off from Bermuda Dunes airport. It certainly had been an unusual visit.

He was welcomed by a bevy of Desert Circus deputies in their colorful costumes and a crowd of some 1000 persons and the usual flurry of flashing cameras, and the welcome of Frank Bogert, producer Tony Owen, Mayor George Beebe and a few other dignitaries. Most everyone wore western dress. After the brief press conference, "which was over almost before it had started," the Duke left for the Las Palmas home of Louis Taubman.

He attended a private cocktail party at the Charlie Farrell House at the Racquet Club. That evening's barbecue at the Taubman house was also an informal affair attended by Kirk and Anne Douglas, Danny Kaye, Jack Warner, Jules Stein (President of MCA and Universal), Mr. and Mrs. Abrahams, Colonel Heald, the Viscount Watkinson who was traveling with the Prince, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Bogert, Tony Owen and his wife Donna Reed, Mr. and Mrs. George Getty, Charlie Farrell and the rest of the Prince's retinue, including Admiral Bonham Carter. Prince Philip spent much time sitting and talking with Kaye. "Cary Grant, Bob Hope and Bing Crosby had been invited but failed to show."

The next day the prince relaxed poolside at the Eldorado Polo Club with hundreds of people in attendance before proceeding to the match. He rode shotgun aside Montie Montana, the famous real roping cowboy, on a stagecoach. The prince changed from limousine to horse and carriage at the Eldorado Polo Club and made a complete circuit of the field to the royal enclosure. Seated with him next to the royal standard in the enclosure were the Taubmans, Abrahams, Bogert, Admiral Carter and Colonel Heald. "The Colonel himself entered into the spirit of the weekend visit to the west by wearing a black cowboy shirt with fancy white design, black trousers and cowboy boots. 'His Royal Highness loves the informality. He is enjoying himself and is struck by the friendliness here. He would like to come back.' Colonel Heald said later."

Before departing, Prince Philip paid a visit to former President Eisenhower at his Eldorado home. Emblematic of the western spirit, Montie Montana, had been on horseback at Eisenhower's 1953 inauguration and audaciously lassoed the new American president, who was good-natured about such an informality (to see video, go to: <http://bit.ly/PresidentMontana>). Despite Prince Philip's preference for the casual, in 1966 Montana hadn't dared to rope the British royal.

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