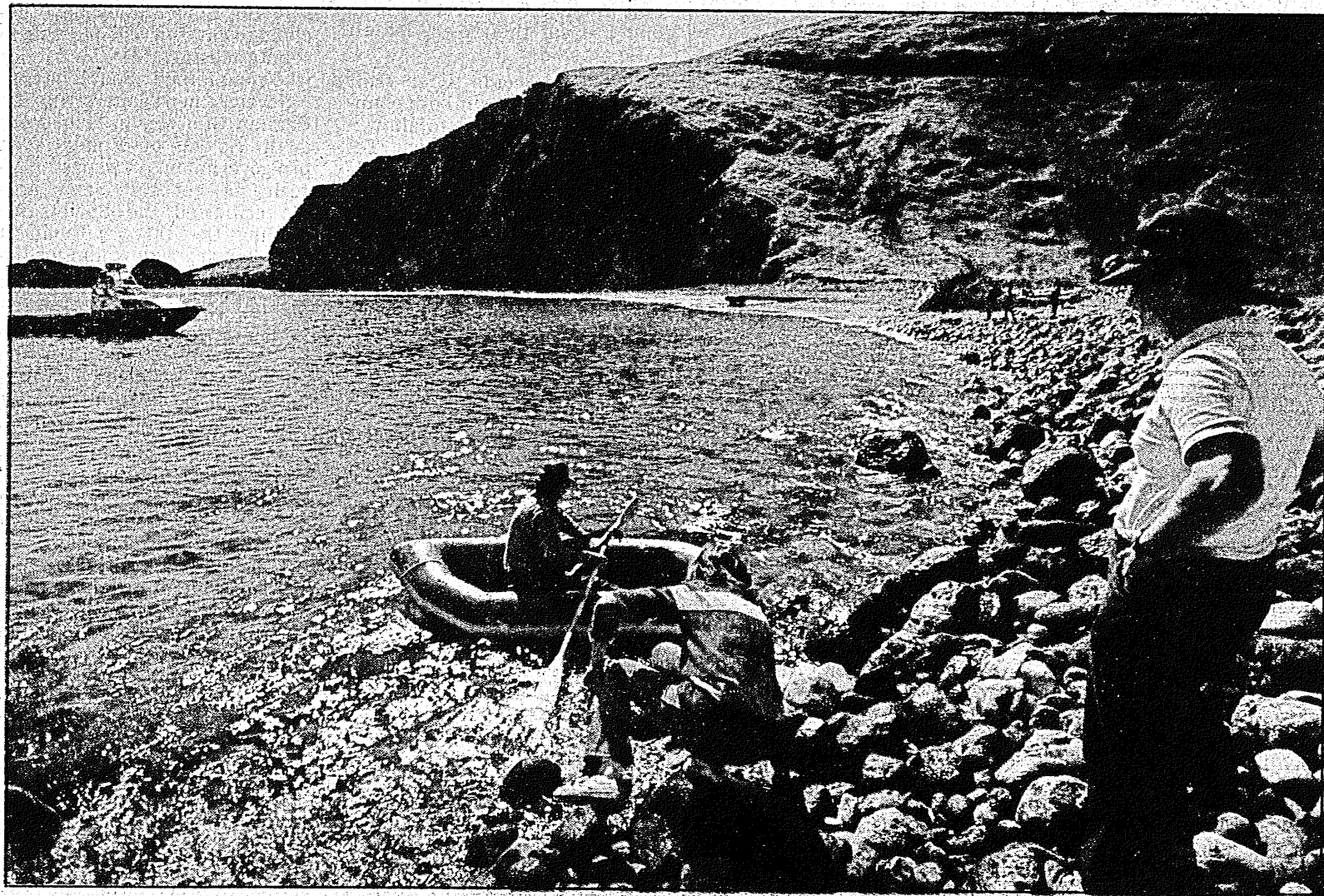




## Santa Cruz: Spectacular island



News-Press photo by STEVE MALONE

At Scorpion Anchorage on Santa Cruz, John Gherini waits for friends to join him on the island where he spent much of his

childhood. His family owns part of the spectacular island which is in the process of becoming a national park.

## It was all work on Santa Cruz Island

*For Sale: An island containing about 60,000 acres of land, well watered and abounding in small valleys of the best pasturage for sheep. There are no wild animals on it that would interfere with livestock. There is a good harbor, and safe anchorage...*

Daily Alta California, May 25, 1858

By Hillary Hauser  
News-Press Staff Writer

At the east end of Santa Cruz Island, John Gherini and Pier Gherini Jr. were walking around old buildings at Scorpion Anchorage, when they came upon the old blacksmith shop.

It was a warm day, and "Pete" (as Pier is called by friends) took off his shirt. Someone said he would look like a blacksmith if he had a little sweat on his chest.

"I left it here years ago," Pete said.

Boyhood summers for Pete and John Gherini meant a lot of hard, sweaty work.

Santa Cruz  
legacy lives on B-1

Third in a series of articles  
on life on the Channel Islands

Although Santa Cruz is the most idyllic of the Channel Islands — with its green interior valley, hills, azure coves, ocean caves, protected anchorages and Devil's Peak towering over all — the main business of the east end had always been sheep ranching.

And sheep ranchers — even young ones — don't often get to go for exploratory hikes, picnics on the beach, or afternoon dips in the deep blue Pacific.

For boys 8 and 10 years old, the idea of spending summers on an island off the California coast would be a Robinson Crusoe-dream come true. For John and Pete, and their younger brother, Tom, a summer on Santa Cruz meant work.

"Sometimes it'd get so hot,

all you'd want to do was get in the ocean," John Gherini said.

### Purchased island

Their great-great grandfather, Justinian Caire, had bought the 60,645-acre island in 1869 for a sheep business, and had passed that business down to them.

Sheep on Santa Cruz are now considered more of a problem than a business. Attitudes have changed since May 25, 1858 — when the island's owners placed an advertisement in "Daily Alta California" trumpeting the fact that no wild animals on the island would interfere with sheep raising.

Today, the 2,000 sheep left on the Gherini end of Santa Cruz and the 1,000 left on the Stanton/Nature Conservancy side of the island are considered a serious threat to the "wild animals" and native plants.

The sheep, however, have had a major part in Santa Cruz Island's history.

When Justinian Caire

bought the island, the first thing he did was build ranch facilities to launch his sheep-ranching enterprise.

An aerial view of Santa Cruz confirms his choice of sites for the main ranch facility.

The island has interior valleys that stretch along much of the 24-mile length of the island. At the east end of a valley accessible from Prisoners Harbor, Caire built his village.

It included a main ranch house (praised by rare visitors as elegant), bunkhouses, stables, a winery (Santa Cruz Island vintners produced some prize-winners in their day), a bakery and a chapel.

All of the structures, some with ornate iron balustrades and French ornamentations, reflect Caire's Mediterranean background.

### Not seen by boaters

The valley complex, now occupied by Dr. Carey Stanton, who has operated a cattle ranch since he moved onto the island in 1957, cannot be seen

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# Santa Cruz Island a worker's paradise

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by boaters sailing around the island.

At the east end of the island, Caire built sheep stations at Scorpion Anchorage and Smugglers Cove. These buildings, visible from the sea, are thick-walled adobes, also built in an architectural style typical of Caire's French alpine youth.

After his death in 1897, Caire's descendants continued the sheep ranching operations — but mostly in their spare time and with hired managers. Most of the Gherinis were, and are, lawyers.

The Gherinis came into the Caire family — and the island — when Caire's granddaughter, Maria Rossi (her mother was Amelia Caire), married Ambrose Gherini, a lawyer from San Francisco.

## Four children

Ambrose and Maria had four children — Pier (Sr.), Francis, Marie "Dini" and Ilda. Pier Gherini Sr., now 74 and living in the family home in Santa Barbara, practiced law in Santa Barbara for more than 40 years.

Pier Sr. and his wife, the former Margaret Whelan, had four children — Pete, John, Tom and Elena.

There was plenty to do — round-ups, shearing, fence construction and the maintenance of island equipment.

For Pete, John and Tom, the main job was sacking wool.

Outside a rustic barn at Scorpion Anchorage, John looked at a six-foot derrick and recalled what this job entailed.

To pack the fleece of newly sheared sheep, the boys had to climb inside six-foot sacks slung from the derricks, positioning themselves at the bottoms of the sacks. As the wool was stuffed through the top, they would pull it down around them, stomping on the wool to pack it.

## Shipped across channel

The sacks, weighing 300 to 350 pounds, would then be sewn and stacked for shipment across the channel.

During shearing season, the Gherini boys packed wool all day. Since summers on Santa Cruz Island are warm, the job often was a hot and sweaty one.

On the recent day Pete and John revisited their stomping grounds, they were accompanied by Channel Islands National Park Superintendent William Ehorn, a family friend, Bill Peeples, and one of

Ehorn's new park rangers, Cindy Nielsen.

The group planned to hike from Scorpion Anchorage to Smugglers Cove, located on the opposite side of San Pedro Point.

The hike, which will be offered to island visitors once the east end of Santa Cruz is acquired by the Park Service, follows a five-mile dirt road.

Riding a three-wheel, thick-tired bush scooter, Owens was eager to show the visitors what he had accomplished in the old island buildings.

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Leading them inside the Scorpion Anchorage bunkhouse, built in 1917, Owens said he had recently cleared the floor of mud — a result of the heavy rains of winter.

At Scorpion Anchorage, Ehorn and the Gherinis were met by Duane Owens, who with his son, Jaret, operates a hunt club on the island. Owens lives in a comfortable, non-electric, propane-powered house in Scorpion Valley with his wife, Doris.

The floor of the bunkhouse was spotless, and Owens was happy that the hearth underneath the pot-belly stove — a huge saw blade — had emerged intact. The bunkhouse is used by hunters coming to the island for expeditions.

## Guides lead hikes

Day visitors coming to the island aboard an Island Packers boat are led on hikes through Scorpion Valley by guides, while Jaret Owens takes hunters into the hills from Smugglers, where they camp.

A group of Canadian archers had been on the island for three days, the elder Owens said. That morning, one of the hunters had bagged a ram weighing 250 pounds.

The Owens' sheep-hunting program, conducted through an agreement with the Gherinis, is the chief method of sheep population control on the island's east end.

Although the Gherinis ceased their ranching operations in 1984, there are ap-

proximately 2,000 animals left on their property.

There are an estimated 1,000 sheep left on the Stanton/Nature Conservancy side of the island. About 20,000 sheep were killed by the Nature Conservancy after it entered a purchase agreement with Stanton in 1978.

The National Park Service, which will eventually acquire the Gherini property, has recommended the removal of the sheep to protect the island from overgrazing.

But there has been a six-year delay in the National Park Service appropriation of the land, and the Gherinis are, in the meantime, proceeding with their own hunting and visiting programs. Day visitors get to the Gherini part of Santa Cruz through Island Packers in Ventura.

At the Scorpion complex, Owens ushered Pete and John Gherini into a two-story adobe building behind the bunkhouse. Standing in the kitchen/dining hall, John slapped the thick walls of the building and talked of his great-great grandfather's youth in France and of his love of French architecture.

## To become museum

Ehorn said the adobe will become a museum when the Park Service takes over the Gherini property. Scorpion Anchorage, in fact, will be the main entrance to the Channel Islands National Park.

Continuing up the path toward Scorpion Valley, the Gherinis passed the old meat house, now full of saddles. In

*Although the Gherinis ceased their ranching operations in 1984, there are approximately 2,000 animals left on their property.*

the blacksmith shop, they surveyed the old equipment used to shoe island horses.

"There was no local hardware store," John said. "We had to improvise."

Further up the road, mounds of rocks scattered over the landscape looked like military bunkers that had fallen into rubble.

The stones, once spread over the fields, were piled into cairns by Italian workers, John

said. The idea was to clean the fields so that grasses such as oat, barley and hay could grow.

John pointed to Montanon, a 1,770-foot mountain barrier separating the Gherini east end property from the west section of the island.

In the shadow of Montanon, the Gherinis worked eight to 10 different sheep pastures. The sheep, he said, had to be rotated from field to field, and during shearing season, they were herded down to Scorpion Anchorage.

In a field toward Smugglers Cove, a white fixed-wing airplane was revving its engines for takeoff. Two archers had just deplaned and were climbing up the hill.

## Offering a ride

Just above the 100-year-old grove of olive trees that leads to Smugglers, Ehorn roared up the path on a four-wheel trail bike. Swift on his feet on the trail, he had already been to Smugglers and was back to offer anyone a ride down the hill.

At Smugglers, the hikers sat at a picnic table in front of the two-story adobe building that was once another of Justinian Caire's sheep stations. It resembles the structure at Scorpion Anchorage, except this one has the year 1889 chiseled over the door.

Ehorn said that when the Park Service acquires the east end of Santa Cruz, much of the visitation pressure on Anacapa will be removed. Currently, most people visiting the Channel Islands National Park go ashore at eastern Anacapa — at the rate of about 100 per day, 75 day visitors and 25 who camp overnight.

Ehorn said he envisions about the same number of people per day visiting Santa Cruz.

## Notes problems

John Gherini noted the problems and delays his family faces over the sale of the east end of the island to the federal government.

"The whole thing is worse than sacking wool," Gherini said.

And as the family continues to operate the east end of Santa Cruz under a cloud of uncertainty, the dealings with the U.S. government only increases Gherini's feelings that all the hard work he did as a young boy inside the hot and sweaty wool sacks was — by comparison — child's play.

**Wednesday: The delicate ecological balance of the islands.**