

Neighboring commune revitalizing lifeless land

Just around the corner from Warm Springs 350 new residents of Central Oregon are busily making a Garden of Eden out of land that was once considered a no-man's land. Clad in sunrise colors, members of the Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune are working land that has been abused and that has suffered from short-sighted farming and ranching practices. The land is being revitalized and turned into a productive environment suitable for supporting up to 3,800 people.

The arrival of these unusually dressed people with their communal living situation disquieted an area of Oregon normally considered conservative, peaceful and isolated. The residents of Antelope now see 50 to 100 tourists daily headed in the direction of Rancho Rajneesh, located 18 miles from the small central Oregon town.

The commune which operates the ranch, called Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, is one of three enterprises operated by followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, spiritual leader of the group.

Followers of the Bhagwan also operate a non-profit religious foundation called Rajneesh Foundation International which is responsible for distribution of books and spiritual material. The Rajneesh Investment Corpora-

tion is a for-profit subsidiary of the Foundation.

According to communications officer Ma Prem Sunshine, the commune is funded solely through donations. However, through agricultural profits and cottage industries the commune should be self-sufficient in a few years.

Taxes are a part of life for Rancho Rajneesh, just as they are for other citizens of the area. The only non-taxable enterprise is the non-profit Rajneesh Foundation International. The church building is also non-taxable.

The Rajneesh Investment Corporation purchased 64,000 acres of impoverished central Oregon land in mid-1981 because the price at \$6 million was "reasonable." Too, the followers of the Rajneesh had a firm desire to revive the land.

We "were looking for land that had been abused and was an ecological disaster... a piece of land that we could restore in keeping with Bhagwan's teachings," Ma Prem Sunshine stated.

Along with the land purchased by Rajneesh Investment Corporation, the ranch also includes 17,000 acres leased from the Bureau of Land Management.

Two-thousand acres, unsuitable for agriculture, has been incorporated into a city called Rajneeshpuram. The city which is divided into three sections will, upon approval of the comprehensive plan by city

council, contain such features as a civic center and performing arts center, small industries, support services and residences.

"Communal living is not for everyone," explains Ma Prem Sunshine. It is necessary that members of a commune enjoy being constantly around other people and be willing to share.

The 350 residents of Rajneeshpuram live six to a house. Each of the custom-built modular units has seven rooms. When there is time commune members will be able to construct their own homes.

Development of the land and keeping in tune with the environment at the same time demands much money and manpower. So far \$25 million has been spent in development of the commune.

Some of the projects have the future of a self-sufficient community foremost in mind. The construction of a dam is in progress which will collect three percent of the water flowing from three creeks on land. Three billion gallons of water will irrigate 400 acres of garden. "The people below us will see more water," says Ma Prem Sunshine.

A small hydroelectric plant will eventually provide electricity for the Rajneesh community. Twenty-five wells have been dug and now provide water for experimental gardens and households. A two-acre greenhouse will enable the production of year-round crops as well as tropical

fruits. The temperature will be computer-controlled. All fertilization is organic. No poisons or chemicals are used. Approximately 8,000 acres will be put into dry land farm crops. Soybeans, barley and wheat will be planted in small patches which is unsuitable for conventional farm machinery. Enough manpower is available to do the work.

Experiments are documented and recorded with the State of Oregon for the use of Oregon's citizens. One of the rules of the land is no hunting. To keep deer from crops, a 17-mile pulsating deer fence has been erected. Because of advanced technology in agriculture, members of the commune feel there is no need to kill to eat. Red meat is not served with meals.

An aviary where guinea fowl, peacocks and chickens are housed is protected by natural means. Rather than shooting predators the commune has imported two Emu. These large birds are known for their loud noises at the approach of predators. They are able to run 55 miles per hour and have the ability to kick hard enough to break the back of a coyote.

Ninety-five beehives will produce honey for the commune along with increasing crop yields. Already, 23,000 trees have been planted. A total of 200,000 trees will be planted in the area to eventually increase moisture in the soil as

well as beauty to the depleted land. An A-rated dairy barn with 35 Holstein cows provides enough milk for cheese, milk and butter for the commune members. A vineyard occupies one hillside at the ranch next to calving barns.

An administration building is currently under construction and an airport provides transportation to meetings. The commune owns a small plane and a nine-passenger jet.

A service station provides gasoline for vehicles owned by the commune. Members who have their own cars must

purchase and maintain their own vehicles.

Keeping close to nature and focusing on the building of a community that blends with the environment and completely self-sufficient living is the goal of the Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune. Giving to the land rather than taking from it is the philosophy taught by their spiritual leader and accounts for their unusual approach to living. Communal members are diligent in their efforts to create a productive environment from a once seemingly barren land.



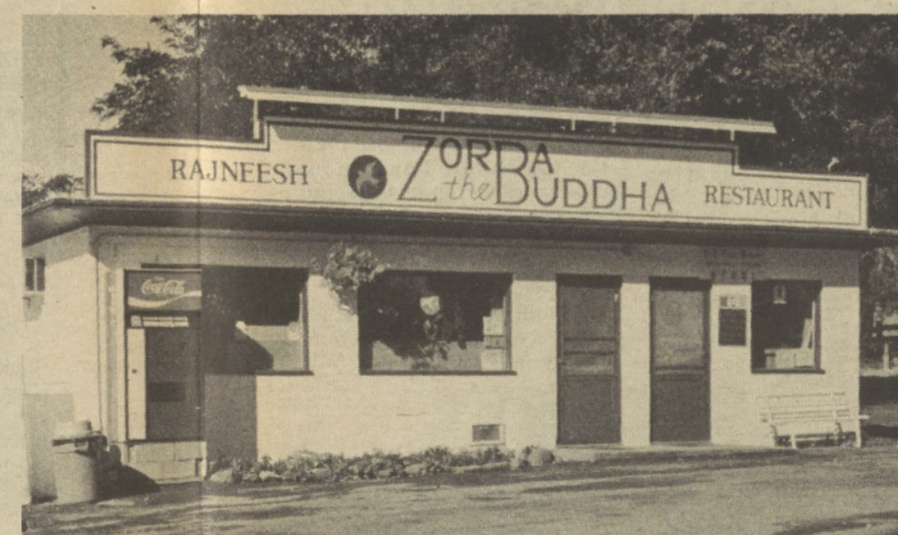
A sign surrounded with flowers indicates entrance to land owned by the Rajneesh Investment Corporation and occupied by the Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune.



Ma Prem Sunshine feeds two imported Emu babies at the commune's aviary. These giant birds from Australia are able to run 55 mph and have the strength to break the back of a coyote. When full-grown they will protect chickens and other fowl from predators.



Members of the commune line the streets of Rajneeshpuram to pay tribute to their spiritual leader as he makes his daily sojourn to Madras and back. This is a social event for the Sannyasin as they are able to talk and socialize with other commune members at this time. The work day normally lasts from 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.



Zorba the Buddha restaurant was established when it appeared that the Rajneesh commune would not be able to incorporate a city on its own land. Since that time they have incorporated and the Antelope restaurant continues to serve tourists and the towns people.



Construction of a dam to provide water for the irrigation of 400 acres is underway. A small hydroelectric plant will be built upon completion of the dam.



A two-acre greenhouse with computer-controlled temperatures will provide vegetable and tropical fruit throughout the year. Experiments are currently being conducted to determine what grows well in the area.

Spilyay Tymoo
photos and text
by
Marsha Shewczyk