

Draft

State of California – The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
PRI# _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code _____
Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Confusion Hill

P1. Other Identifier: N/A

*P2. Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted

*a. County Mendocino

and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad Piercy, Ca Date 1969 (revised 1994) T24N; R 17W; portion of Sec 20; Mount Diablo B.M.

c. Address 75001 North Highway 101 City Piercy Zip 95587

d. UTM: (give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone _____; _____mE/ _____mN

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate)

Assessor Parcel Number 53-270-11

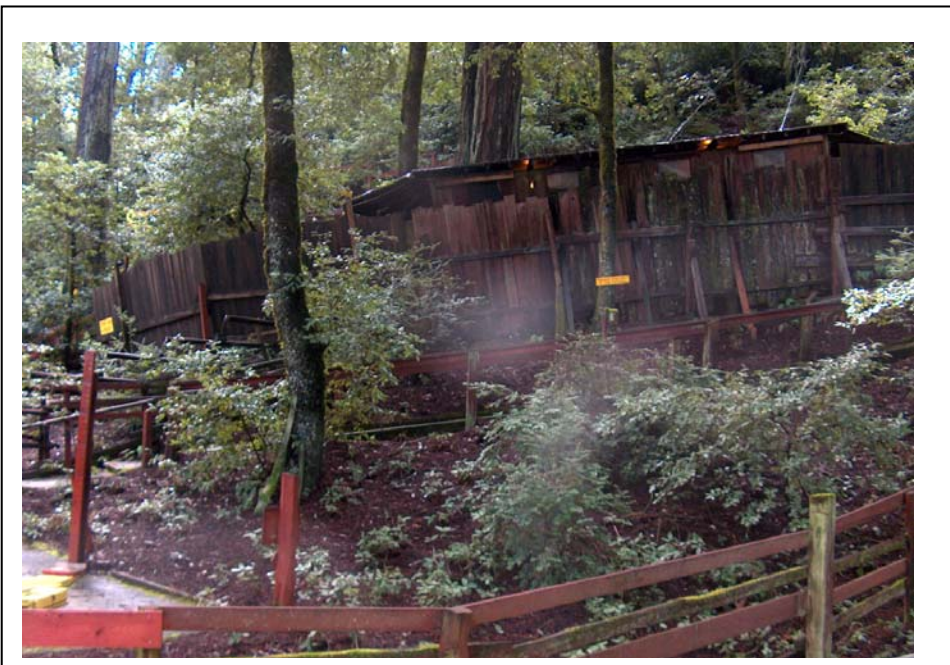
*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

Confusion Hill, a roadside amusement park established around 1949, is located on a 13-acre parcel east of SR 101, 3.5 miles south of Piercy, California. The parcel is heavily forested land, largely covered with mature and old growth redwood trees. The amusement park occupies a steep hill, with its focal attraction being a "Gravity House" designed to confuse people; hence the name Confusion Hill. Most of the improvements at Confusion Hill were constructed between 1949 and 1955. Today, Confusion Hill consists of four venues or attractions that include the Gravity House, snack and gift/curio shop, mountain train ride, and the redwood shoe house. Other contributing resources constructed between 1949 and 1955 include the manager's cottage, restrooms, a ticket booth, and extensive landscaping features that include fencing, walkways, paths, and signage. A massive totem pole, and several other more recent folk art redwood carvings, including a "pointing hand," a giant panda bear, and the "chipalopes," make-believe chipmunks with horns were created in the 1990s. A residence, built in 1959 for the original owners George and "Willie" Hudson, sits atop the "hill" near more modern barn. Confusion Hill has been in continuous operation since opening in 1949. (See Continuation Sheet)

*P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP6, HP25

*P4. Resources Present: Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5b. Description of Photo: (View, date, accession #)



*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:
Historic Prehistoric Both
1949-1955, Mendocino County Tax Assessment Records

*P7. Owner and Address:
Douglas E. and Donald R. Campbell
75001 N. Hwy 101
Piercy, CA 95587

*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, address)
Douglas Campbell, owner

*P9. Date Recorded: 2/2/2001

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)
California Point of Historical Interest/California Register of Historical Resources

*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.")

*Attachments: NONE Location Map Sketch Map Continuation Sheet Building, Structure, and Object Record Archaeological Record District Record Linear Feature Record Milling Station Record Rock Art Record Artifact Record Photograph Record Other (list) _____

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State of California – The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

Primary # _____
ARI# _____

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*NRHP Status Code _____

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Confusion Hill

B1. Historic Name: Confusion Hill

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: roadside gravity house amusement park B4. Present Use: roadside gravity house amusement park

*B5. Architectural Style: vernacular

*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alteration, and date of alterations) 1949-1950 - Gravity House, Gift shop, manager's residence, circulation features; 1947 - Shoe House, moved onto property between 1950-1952; 1955 - 1.5-mile 20-gauge railroad and depot; restroom facilities; ticket booth; 1992 - totem pole;

*B7. Moved? No Yes Unknown Date: _____ Original Location: _____

*B8. Related Features: _____

B9. Architect: _____ b. Builder: _____

*B10. Significance: Theme _____ Area Legget/Piercy

Period of Significance 1949-1955 Property Type _____ Applicable Criteria 1 and 3

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

Confusion Hill, which includes the Gravity House, gift and snack shop, manager's residence, restrooms, and landscaping meets the registration requirements as a California Point of Historical interest because it is the only example of a gravity house theme park in the local area of Mendocino County. In addition, Confusion Hill meets California Register eligibility under Criterion 1 and 3 for its association with the themes of tourism, recreation, roadside theme parks and rustic vernacular architecture along the Redwood Highway. The period of significance is between 1949 with the construction of the park's first element, the Gravity House, until 1955 when the last major improvement was completed, the train ride. Based upon historic documents, oral history, and photographs, with the exception of the logging in the 1990s atop the "hill," the remaining portions of the theme park retain integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, and association. Three non-contributing properties were identified, which include the 1959 owner's residence and barn and the train ride, which has lost integrity of setting due to logging during the 1990s. (See Continuation Sheet)

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes)

*B12. References: See Continuation Sheet

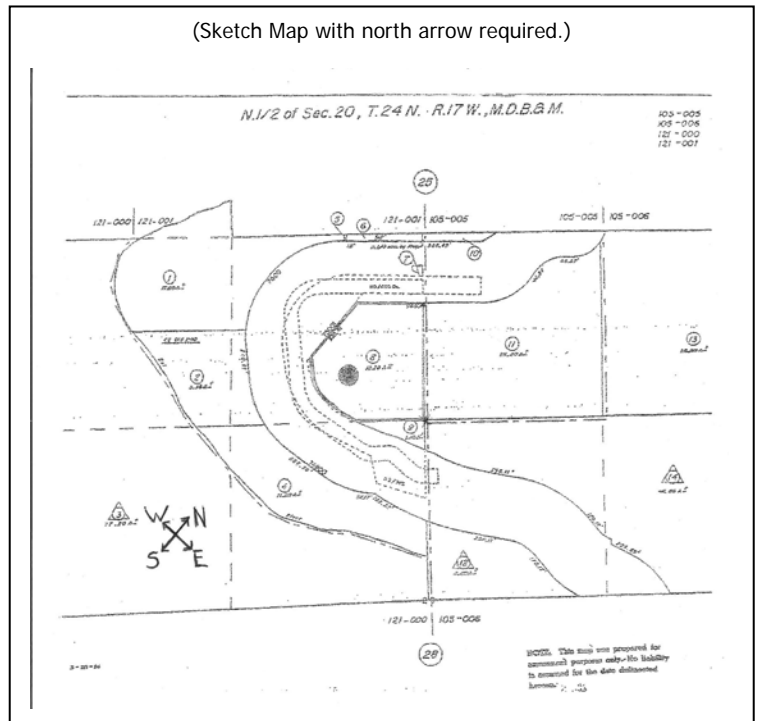
B13. Remarks:

*B14. Evaluator: Douglas Campbell/Dana Supernowicz

*Date of Evaluation: 2004

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch Map with north arrow required.)



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***P3a. Description (Continued)**

The majority of buildings, structures, objects, and landscaping that comprise Confusion Hill were constructed between 1949 and 1955. The buildings, structures, and objects at Confusion Hill today consist of the Gift and Snack Shop (1950-1952), the old Owner’s Residence (1950-1952), the Gravity House (circa 1949), Restrooms (1950-1952), a 1½ mile 20 gauge Railroad (1955), the Shoe House (built 1947; moved to present location in circa 1950), the new owner’s residence and barn (1959), extensive redwood fences, walkways, parking area, picnic area, and a 40-foot totem pole (circa 1992) carved out of a redwood stump. The Mountain Train Ride, consists of a 1 ¼ mile, 20 gauge track, whereby a gas powered, home-made locomotive pulls a series of cars carrying tourists through young and old growth redwood trees. 50 The ride takes approximately 30 minutes and passes by various pieces of historic redwood logging equipment. The track was reportedly laid down around 1954-55, while the engine or locomotive which pulls the cars is powered by a diesel engine and was built in the last 10 years, as the original locomotive was destroyed by a redwood which blew down in a wind storm.¹

Constructed in 1949 by George Hudson, the Gravity House is perhaps the most successful venue at Confusion Hill. Although purported to have a strange gravitational pull, the Gravity House, carefully engineered along a steep slope is largely an optical illusion. The building measures 12’ x 24’ with wood foundation, board and batten siding, and a shingle/composition roof; a water system, and septic tank. The foundation of the Gravity House slants sharply downward and the floor is slanted at an incline. It all appears very confusing for when you're inside, marbles roll uphill and you can lean in many unusual positions.

The Redwood Shoe House, which resembles a large high top shoe, was originally designed as a float in a Fort Bragg parade in 1947. It was reportedly brought to Confusion Hill around 1949-50, when the tourist attraction first opened. The Shoe House looks remarkably the same as when it was first placed on the property.

The combination snack and curio shop building measures 21’ x 40’. Also constructed on the property between 1950-1952 is a 160’ x 6’ high stained wood fence; a 6’ high 22’ long redwood board fence; a 8’ x10’ ticket office with a rock foundation and 1” x 8” v-rustic siding; restrooms measuring 7’ x 16’ with a concrete foundation and board and batten walls.

The Totem Pole is reportedly the largest “free-standing” redwood chainsaw carving in the world. It stands roughly 40 feet high and took over three months to create during the early 1990s when Confusion Hill was owned by Bruce and Joyce Willis. The Chipalopes are a modern appellation at Confusion Hill, and were created by Douglas Campbell as a gag, like the jackalopes seen on postcards and other tourist memorabilia from the Southwest. The Chipalopes, according to Douglas Campbell, are fictitious horned chipmunks that can be seen feeding in the park.

¹ Oral history, particularly an interview between Dana Supernowicz and George Hudson’s stepson, Wayne Van Horn, the Confusion Hill Website, and historic records and photographs assisted in documenting the evolution of the roadside theme or amusement park.

***B10. Significance (Continued)**

(Historic Context excerpts from, “Historic Resources Evaluation Report for Confusion Hill”, prepared by Dana Supernowicz, July 2004. Historic Context excerpts are printed with permission of the author.

Introduction

With the creation of State Route 1 in 1909, the state’s first official highway in California, entrepreneurs took advantage of the new route and established service stations, restaurants, inns, guest cabins, and other tourist accommodations along its course.² While some of these improvements fell within the mainstream of American architecture, others were quite unique or unusual, many drawing from the area’s natural and cultural landscape. The high point in the development of this "rustic or roadside vernacular" design occurred in the 1920s through the 1950s with the creation of motor courts, tourist cabins, and gift shops. Along State Route 1, which was later renamed Highway 101 or the “Redwood Highway,” these tourist attractions became an integral part of the highway system much like the native coastal redwoods.

History of Roadside Theme Parks and Anti-Gravity or Tilting Houses

The history of theme or amusement parks began in America during the mid-nineteenth century, when urbanization led to better transportation systems, including trains and trolleys, which resulted in the creation of amusement parks to stimulate ridership.³ The traditional American amusement park generally consisted of a ferris wheel, roller coaster, fun house, and other types of amusements. While these types of parks were the most common in urban areas, rural parts of American began to develop their own, perhaps unique, style of theme park.

The difference between urban and rural roadside theme parks may be simply the park’s setting. Whether in the deserts of Nevada or Arizona or deep in California’s redwood forests, rural landscapes offered visitors a unique opportunity to experience the juxtaposition of nature and popular culture. The rural theme park, in particular, had the benefit of providing a recreational experience, while at the same time providing entertainment.

It was often in rural America where the most eccentric or quirky types of architecture proliferated. From California to Maine, eccentric architecture could be found, much of which was centered in roadside parks, some with “mystery” themes. The “mystery theme” idea developed from the old theme parks with sideshows, quirky buildings, and optical illusions. One of the “mystery” themes that developed in various parts of the United States was the “anti-gravitational house,” also referred to as the “tilt house” or the “gravity house.” According to Rick Davis, one of the earliest known versions of the tilting house was the “Trick House,” invented in 1904 and patented in 1905 by Arthur B. Griffen. Griffen’s version envisioned a small, normal looking house, at least on the outside, which included a slanted floor to which perpendicular wood and furnishings were attached. The entrance and exit would be through passageways which blocked the view of the outside. Similarly, no windows were permitted other than a skylight. The end result was that there were no outside references, so guests would be disoriented and have a difficult time negotiating the building.⁴ It is not known how many, or if any, of Griffen’s “Trick Houses” were built, but the idea caught on, although with some minor improvisation.

² US 101 is one of the earliest state routes. It was originally recommended for the state highways map in 1896, and was adopted into the highway system in 1909. Construction began in 1912. North of San Francisco to 5 miles north of Crescent City was SR-1. Beginning in the mid-1930s, portions of the roadway were signed as US 101.

³ National Amusement Park Historical Association (NAPHA) Industry History. “The Amusement Park Industry: A Very Brief History.” www.napha.org, 2004.

⁴ Rick Davis. “The Tilt house: A Slanted View of the World.” November 3, 2003. <http://dafe.org>.

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*B10. Significance (Continued)

Only a handful of theme or amusement parks in California, however, ever had tilt houses, and even fewer have survived through the decades. In California, the theme parks that once included “mystery shacks,” “tilt houses” or “gravity houses” include the Mystery Spot in Santa Cruz County, Confusion Hill in Mendocino County, Calico Ghost Town near Yermo, San Bernardino County, and Knott’s Berry Farm in Buena Park, Orange County. The “Haunted Shack” as it was called at Knott’s Berry Farm was demolished several years ago and the “Mystery Shack” at Calico burned in 2001 and has since been rebuilt.⁵ It should be noted that besides the properties listed above, there were other mystery shacks and tilt houses across the United States, however, many of those properties have also been demolished.

The first anti-gravity house in the West Coast was reportedly built in Southern Oregon near Gold Hill, commonly known as the “Vortex.”⁶ At least according to guidebooks and local lore, only the Mystery Spot, Confusion Hill, and the Oregon Vortex actually have a scientific rationale for their weird anti-gravitational forces. Known also as the Oregon Vortex House of Mystery, the Oregon Vortex reportedly began its life as a mining cabin, built in 1904 by the Grey Eagle Mining Company. In 1930, the cabin was opened to the public by John Lister, geologist, mining engineer, and physicist, who believed that there was scientific evidence that the cabin sat atop a gravitational anomaly. The Oregon Vortex, so-named because of the spherical field of force at the “spot,” has been open to the public on and off since 1930 and remains a popular tourist attraction.⁷

The Oregon Vortex shares many similarities with Confusion Hill, particularly the design of the Gravity or Mystery House and its setting, although only the Mystery Spot at Santa Cruz and Confusion Hill are located in a dense grove of mature redwood trees.

Many of the legends surrounding Confusion Hill are similar to other anti-gravity houses. Some purport that the building or shack accidentally slid down the side of the mountain, coming to rest against trees, which accounts for its strange tilt. Then the owner noticed strange and weird effects, but only within that local area or spot. Virtually all of the tour guides state that the gravitational effects are due to strange phenomena in the area or magnetic anomalies.

What these properties share is uniqueness, eccentricity, and a sense of mystery. The Oregon Vortex, Santa Cruz Mystery Spot and Confusion Hill were developed during a period of rapid industrial and technological expansion, including improvements in this nation’s highways, and all three locations remain popular to succeeding generations of roadside tourists.

History of Confusion Hill

Confusion Hill has been in operation since 1949, when George Hudson leased land and built a small inclined wood-frame structure that he called the “Gravity House.” Hudson and his wife, Poala, nicknamed “Willie,” owned and operated the roadside park from its opening in 1949 through 1992, when the property was sold to Bruce and Joyce Willis.⁸ The property was again sold in 1999 to Douglas and Donald Campbell. After Donald Campbell’s

⁵ See list of mystery shack and tilt house locations, <http://www.dafe.org/attractions/history/tilthouse/tilthouse3.php> October 14, 2009.

⁶ Confusion Hill and many other off the wall mystery spots are described in Kristan Lawson and Anneli S. Rufus, *America: Off the Wall, The West Coast*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1989: 134-135.

⁷ See “The Oregon Vortex.” www.oregonvortex.com, October 14, 2009.

⁸ Dana Supernowicz personal communication, Wayne Van Horn, June 20, 2004.

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death, Douglas Campbell and his wife continue to operate and maintain the roadside theme park in the same manner that Hudson operated it over 50 years ago.

Historic documents, including deeds, tax records, published histories, and oral history provide an accurate picture of the development and ownership of Confusion Hill. According to Wayne Van Horn, stepson of George Hudson and son of Willie Myrtle Hudson (nee Van Horn), he recalled his family’s history and his memories of growing up and visiting Confusion Hill. The Van Horns were some of the first settlers in the Imperial Valley of California, according to Wayne Van Horn. His mother, “Willie” Myrtle divorced Ray Van Horn in the 1930s and later met George Hudson in the Los Angeles area. By the late 1920s, the Van Horns had a large dairy operation near Bakersfield, having moved from the Imperial Valley. After meeting in Los Angeles, Willie and George married around 1940. According to Wayne, George Hudson was born in Oregon around 1907 or 1908 and later moved to Southern California. George worked in a machine shop in the Los Angeles area and was an inventor on the side. After World War II, George was interested in locating a place to establish a commercial business and had already experimented with gravity houses, having made a model out of balsa wood. Apparently, George, having a creative mind, had invented an improved electric cord, a golf cart and paddles for swimming, yet with only a high school education.

In the late 1940s the search for a commercial property took them into Northern California along SR 101. In 1949, George, his wife Willie, and his partner Leroy Shipman acquired an option to purchase approximately 13 acres of land on the east side of State Highway 101. According to Wayne Van Horn, Leroy was Hudson’s nephew or cousin. The property was covered with mature and old growth redwood trees. The Hudsons pitched a tent on the property. George’s brother Charles assisted in clearing young trees and preparing the property for the “Gravity House.” Following construction of the Gravity House in 1950, the Hudsons built the snack bar and gift shop and manager’s residence. In 1955, Wayne Van Horn provided partial financing to the George for the 20 gauge railroad, which required some engineering since the train could not climb more than a 6% grade. In order to facilitate the steep grade, the engine was weighted to prevent it from slipping.⁹ In later years a 100 mile gale blew through Confusion Hill toppling several redwood trees, one of which crushed the engine used to pull the train. Although a modern ranch style home was built atop Confusion Hill in 1959, by the 1960s the Hudsons were living Santa Paula and the theme park was managed part of the year by George’s half brother Lewis Ataberry. George and Willie continued to visit and live at the park during the summer months. During George’s spare time he continued to invent various items, including what became known as the Hudson water valve, which was patented and is still being marketed for irrigation use. In 1982 Willie Hudson died and a few years later George remarried. George continued to manage the park, although in failing health he succumbed to his illness and died in a Garberville hospital in 1987. The estate, including Confusion Hill, was bequeathed to family members. After a four year probate, the park was sold in 1991.¹⁰

In the fall of 1998, Gary R. Mason and Sara Amy Leach published an article in the Society for Commercial Archaeology Journal entitled “The Redwood Highway: Ancient Trees and Tourist Bait.”¹¹ The article focused on the Redwood Highway remarks that Confusion Hill, at least when they visited the theme park, had “retained the least of its early roadside glamour,” as compared to other similar attractions such as the Trees of Mystery and the

⁹ Dana Supernowicz personal Communication, Wayne Van Horn, June 20, 2004.

¹⁰ Dana Supernowicz personal Communication, Wayne Van Horn, July 1, 2004.

¹¹ Gary R. Mason and Sara Amy Leach. “The Redwood Highway: Ancient Trees and Tourist Bait.” *Journal for the Society for Commercial Archaeology*, Fall 1998, Vol. 16, No. 2. pp. 4-11.

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State of California – The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
CONTINUATION SHEET

Primary # _____
ARI # _____
Trinomial _____

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*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) _____

*Recorded by _____ *Date _____ Continuation Update

Sea Lion Caves in Oregon. Sara Amy Leach was contacted regarding the article and, as she explains, when she visited the site with Gary Mason, it was in great disrepair owing to the owner, Bruce Willis, who had recently logged the upper hill above the Gravity House. The loss of charm was apparently the radical change along the course of the train ride through the old growth redwood, which until the mid-1990s gave this part of the park an important part of its identity.¹²

Fortunately, none of the logging occurred near the Gravity House or other venues located alongside the highway. According Wayne Van Horn and other informants, who either managed or owned Confusion Hill, the park appears to have been fairly successful from its opening in 1949. The Gravity House was the most popular venue followed by the train ride. Today, the park’s theme of “mystery and confusion” is combined with historic interpretation focusing on redwood trees and redwood logging. What makes the roadside theme park particularly unique is that only three “gravity houses” seem to have survived along the West Coast, one of which survives to this day at Confusion Hill. Gravity houses, which clearly required some degree of engineering, appeal to both adults and children, while the park’s “scaled down” secondary attractions, such as the shoe house and 20 gauge railroad, are particularly appealing to children and reflect the unique, quirky attractions that continue to make a trip along the Redwood Highway so appealing.

Confusion Hill reflects the evolution of roadside commercial architecture from the late 1940s through the late 1950s, expressed in the form of rather eccentric vernacular buildings and structures. The property also conveys a unique, perhaps idiosyncratic design ethos associated with California’s redwood forests and found almost exclusively in northern California. The adoption of the redwood tree into a rustic vernacular form of architecture demonstrates how nature and culture can meld into one entity and create a phenomenon that continues to this day.

¹² Dana Supernowicz personal Communication. Sara Amy Leach, June 2004.

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*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) _____

*Recorded by _____ *Date _____ Continuation Update

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