



THE PONDEROSA

the PINE RIDGE ASSOCIATION

NEWS LETTER

December 1980



FROM UNDER MY BRIM

I always think of fall as a quiet and peaceful time of year, but on a recent hike the sounds I heard were many, varied and at times loud. The now fully ripe acorns are falling like the large drops at the start of a rain storm. Some can be heard to ricochet off limbs before they hit the ground and roll down the hillsides through the leafy forest floor. The Juncos and Brown Towhees, the White Crown, Golden Crown and Lark Sparrows chatter from the thicket and the adjacent open field where they feed. With a frightening speed and suddenness a Sharp-shinned Hawk swishes into the thicket. An empty-handed hawk flies off to the sound of chatter now raised in intensity and pitch by fear. Along a narrow trail a lizard that is never seen scurries off noisily through the dry leaves, and how frightening it is to approach a covey of quail to within feet, never seeing them until they explode into simultaneous flight. Grasshoppers make a popping noise as they move from underfoot. On the grassy hillside the wind whispers through the stems of the bending grass, and at the ridge top the only thing that is heard above the whistling of the wind through the pines is the yacking and pecking of a group of acorn woodpeckers. The cry of a Red-tailed Hawk is heard but none can be seen. When the sound is heard again, it seems to come from a nearby tree. No hawk is seen there but instead a Stellar's Jay with his imitating cry. An actual hawk flies silently by, its shadow crosses a ground squirrel at his hole and the squirrel lets out a piercing warning whistle. With the sun below the horizon, the sound of the falling leaves seems more noticeable, and in the distance can be heard the howl of a coyote. I found that fall is not necessarily a quiet time of year, yet a walk in the fall woods will leave you with a truly peaceful feeling.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- * The annual membership meeting will be held on Dec. 16, 1980 at Dave Hildebrand's house. The address is 791 Midvale Lane, San Jose. The meeting will start at 7:30. You can get instructions on how to get there by calling Dave on 269-5652. Don't forget to bring your two dollars for your 1981 membership so you will continue to get the PONDOROSA. If you are unable to come to the meeting, please mail your dues to the Park soon.
- * The annual passes are now on sale for \$25.00.
- * We are sorry to report that the plaque at Los Cruzeros was recently stolen. The plaque was placed there as part of the de Anza Trek reenactment in 1976 on memory of de Anza's expedition through the area 200 years before.

LETS MAINTAIN !

This new section is intended to keep you up to date on maintenance happenings at the Park.

A LOOK BACK AT 1980 - Just what did we get done? Well to start off with, about 2.5 miles of new trail were put in on Middle Ridge in January. A total of 916 man-hours were put in on this project. The sign program is now almost complete. Some 140 new metal signs have been put in. Nearly 600 feet of corral fence in the Headquarters area were rebuilt. Almost 500 hours were spent clearing fuel breaks around the buildings and campground in July. 200 hours were spent clearing slides and grading the backcountry roads. Two new drinking fountains were installed in the Headquarters area. The pit toilets at Poverty Flat and Frog Lake were relocated and repaired. Four large Valley Oaks in the Headquarters area were safely pruned in November. A new horse camp was set up at Schaffers's Corral complete with pit toilet, hitching rail, water trough, and fire rings.

Of course not everything went according to plan. The trees that fell between January and August required almost 80 man hours clear. Two ramadas, three pit toilets, and a number of signs had to be repaired because of vandalism.

WHATS IN STORE FOR 1981? - When C.E.T.A. worker Chris Bergman left in October, we were informed that his position would not be refilled. This reduces the Park staff by 1/3. The Governor has stated that spending will be held to a 1% increase this year. Material costs continue to rise at an astronomical rate. Visitor attendance is also going up. What all this means is that the Park will have to depend more and more on volunteer help if the current level of service is to continue through 1981.

In the coming year we plan to have at least one volunteer project every month. These projects will be announced in the PONDEROSA a month or two ahead of time so you will have plenty of time to plan if you want to help out. Any suggestions for improvements of Park facilities or services are welcomed.

- John -

1981 DOCENT PROGRAM

Remember those people who were always hanging around the museum last spring? The ones who answered questions you never thought to ask; taking you on 1 mile nature walks that seemed more like 10; you know, the people that wore those semi-offical looking Ponderosa Pine badges. We're talking of course of the Henry W. Coe State Park volunteer docents and soon we will be setting up our 1981 program.

The purpose of the docent program is to provide the park visitor with a better understanding of the area's human and natural history through a variety of interpretive programs given by the volunteer. If you would like to learn more about the park, it's history, it's plants and animals, and can spare 8 hours a month (on week-ends) during March, April, and May, then you might consider becoming a docent.

For more information and/or sign-up, call Barry at the park (779-2728).

BACK COUNTRY RAMBLINGS

There is a new trail at H.W. Coe S.P. that you may not have had a chance to explore yet . . .

It runs from Poverty Flat and up onto Middle Ridge where the Middle Fork and the Little Fork of the Coyote join. It climbs Middle Ridge on its wooded North facing slope, passing thru several large groves of Ponderosa Pine.

This side of Middle Ridge shows less impact from decades of cattle grazing than most other areas of the Park, and native bunch grasses are here more common than the European annual grasses.

As you climb above the Middle Fork take time to enjoy the fine views of Blue Ridge. You may spot hawks, vultures or an occasional Golden Eagle riding the winds above the canyon. You should be able to distinguish an Eagle by its size, it is much bigger than a red tail; its color, very dark except for possible light "windows" on the underside of its wings; the way it holds its wings, horizontal without the pronounced "V" of the vulture; and its whistle, hard to describe but not forgotten once heard.

As the trail cuts across the numerous gullies that furrow the side of the ridge, notice the unusual size of the Madrones that are found here. Several gnarled giants look as if a Hobbit or Elf might jump from the jumbled wood rat nests piled round their roots.

After a mile and a half of hiking and a climb of nearly 1000 feet, a few switch backs bring us thru an old gate in the fence line at the top of the ridge. Here the trail breaks out into meadows and open grassland. During the Spring and Summer you are likely to see Western Bluebirds flying between the meadows and the woods. In late March the skies fill with wheeling and darting swallows.

Another easy mile along the crest of the ridge brings us to a trail junction. By turning left here, we drop down into the Little Fork Canyon and can follow the Fish Trail back to Pine Ridge and Park Headquarters. By staying to the right we stay on top of Middle Ridge, following the Middle Ridge Trail towards Frog Lake, and Deer Horn Spring.

For those of you who don't relish hiking on Fire Roads, this new trail provides a fine alternative route between Pine Ridge and the backcountry. It's uninterrupted views and unusual flora make for a truly enjoyable hike.

If any of you have a favorite trail or hike that you would like to share, jot down your ideas and leave them with Barry, and we'll try to include them in later issues of the PONDEROSA. Eventually, we may polish the best trail descriptions and collect them into a Park Trail Guide.

stands an unusually large and symmetrical clump of giant manzanita, well worth a brief pause for inspection.

From Mt. Sizer the trail descends by a series of short steps with several hundred yards of relatively level going between them. At first there is open forest to the left with a few scattered ponderosa pines, mostly looking stressed by drought, and more digger pine and manzanita. To the right are once again found open meadows.

These steep meadows are worthy of special comment. In the late spring, before the wildflowers have vanished, these meadows take on an almost sensuous quality. When the grasses are headed with seed and the stems still moist and flexible, the wind does remarkable things. As it sweeps up from the southwest the grasses bow in sweeping waves, damped into slow motion by the weight of the millions of mature seeds. One could easily become hypnotized, but can break the spell by remembering that the principle grasses, wild oat and foxtail, are both introduced Mediterranean weeds!

Along the second plateau the forest to the left is replaced by chapparel and for the first time one has sweeping views simultaneously from both sides of the ridge. After yet a third drop, one comes upon a lovely grove of HEALTHY ponderosa pine, and then very shortly upon the trail down to Black Oak Spring. The total distance you have traveled along the fire road at this point is now about four miles.

The trail to Black Oak Spring (now truly a trail) sweeps down through forest almost immediately crossing the 3,000 foot contour and dropping about 600 feet to the camp. Surprisingly ponderosa pine persists almost the entire distance to the camp. Shortly before the camp, a trail branches right to the spring, rejoining the camp trail below the campsite. Just before reaching the campsite, there are a number of giant manzanitas, with their winter bark appearing like polished mahogany. Through the forest, one can see the meadowed slopes of Rockhouse Ridge ascending beyond Rockhouse Canyon.

Beyond the campsite itself, a small level shoulder, the trail is a bit obscure, but eventually reaches the creek. Departure from the camp leaves the last of the ponderosas, and crossing the creek abruptly replaces forest with meadow. The high point ahead is Hat Rock about 2600 feet, and the trail sweeps first broadly to the left, and then back to the right in front of this landmark. Eventually, the trail climbs past it to the right and intersects the Rockhouse Ridge trail itself, about two miles from Blue Ridge, or six miles in all.

Hat Rock itself is worth a brief side trip. It is so well fortified by giant digger pines and a few tangled bay trees that the Mexican hat on top is scarcely visible from most angles. The northeast face is a short but serious rock climb, and should be avoided by the inexperienced. However, the southwest face is well broken by a series of ledges, and the summit can be reached by a scramble. One is now level with or above the tops of the digger pines. Sitting on top of the Hat, one has a remarkable sensation of isolation, remoteness, and beauty. If you are heading home this same evening, you should not tarry long. It is 9.6 miles to headquarters.

Winslow Briggs