THE PONDEROSA

The Pine Ridge Association

Newsletter

April 1990

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

They ran from the sweat house, but this time they did not jump into the cool stream. They knew their animal-frightening, human scent was hidden by the smell of smoke. One of them, a slender young man from this isolated canyon village, knew the pronghorn would be wandering into the valley any day as they did every year at this time. This year would be special for him: he would hunt them for the first time.

He jogged two miles from camp to a low bench with a northwest exposure that sat 20 feet above the wide part of the valley. Here he squatted down, focused his attention inward, and sat motionless for over two hours. He felt the warmth of the morning's sun through the blue oaks as it projected itself in moving mosaic patterns on his back. He didn't know the word "photosynthesis," but he knew the sun's energy was being sucked up by the leaves—the same energy that would drive the speedy legs of his adversary. He had more than hope—he felt deep in his spirit that the time was right and the circle would be completed.

Up the valley, a herd of 36 pronghorn came running. In the great valley to the east, he had seen herds of a thousand or more. A large red ant crawled up his leg—it tickled him, and he knew that if it bit, he might not be able to stay still. He shuttered a little, then, with a gentle flick the ant flew to the ground—all done with the rhythm of the wind to remain a part of his surroundings. The pronghorn slowed as they came to the wider part of the valley. He watched them as they fed on the buckwheat, goldenbush, and other low shrubs—he knew that in the great valley they would eat grass and wildflowers. He slowly raised his bow but not to shoot. On the end of the bow was a golden eagle feather, and it began to flutter in the breeze. Curiosity, a trait of the pronghorn, did not let him down, and a good sized doe advanced slowly towards him. Although not all the does had horns, this one did—they were about a third the length of an arrow. All the full-grown bucks had horns, some over half the length of an arrow.

As she approached to within 50 feet, he began to appreciate her beauty. Her coat was a beautiful, rich tan, and the soft white of her rump ran under her belly and up the front of her neck where two tan bars crossed it. Her eyes seemed wholly out of her head as if added as an afterthought. He knew she could see ahead as far as an eagle, but images in front, to the sides, and even behind were seen without moving her head—great protection from the coyote, wolf, and mountain lion. Her nose, covered with a wet film, twitched, attempting to satisfy her curiosity. As she nervously approached to within 20 feet, he thought, "Should I shoot now?" His thoughts turned back to last year, when at the same spot a pronghorn buck had approached as close. As his father took aim, the buck had bolted as it stepped on a twig that broke with a loud snap, the shot had missed, and the pronghorn's white rump patches had nearly doubled in size as they flashed a warning to the whole herd, which had ran swiftly off.

He thought, "What if I miss; what if I only wound her; what if—stop thinking—use your instincts as you were taught." He felt the circle closing—it was time. He quickly lowered his already-loaded bow, pulled back, and let go, not just with his fingers but releasing an inner power that took the arrow straight to the animal's heart. She turned, then dropped. She had given her life for him. They were both a part of the whole. In respect for her, he would not waste any part of her body.

He put her 100 pounds over his shoulders and returned to

home with pride. There he began the process he had learned from his father. He dressed out the animal. The meat would be shared by the whole tribe. Tendons would be used to attach arrowheads to the shafts. The leg bones were special. They were much stronger than those of any other animal—the pronghorn's slender legs needed to be very strong in order for it to be able to run 40 or 50 miles per hour to escape the coyotes and wolves—strong enough to withstand the burst of speed of up to 70 miles per hour to escape the pounce of a mountain lion. Their strength lends well to the making of strong awls and other tools. The biggest prize of all was the pelt. It had served the pronghorn well—the good insulating properties of the tubular hairs keeping her warm in the winter and cool in the summer. It would serve him well, too. The pronghorn could raise its own hairs to help ventilate its body—he would have to brush the hair. The horns, with their little prongs, would serve many purposes. These horns were like the antlers of the deer because they were shed every year, but differed because the shed part attached to bones in the head like true horns.

Soon many changes would come about. White men would hunt the pronghorn until they were nearly gone. The pronghorn (often improperly called "antelope"—their unusual horns put them in a separate group from the true antelope) numbered over 40 million before the coming of the Europeans. At the start of the 19th century, their numbers had been reduced to below 20,000. They were killed by the thousands by market hunters for food, by trappers for hides, and, sadly, by others just for the fun of it.

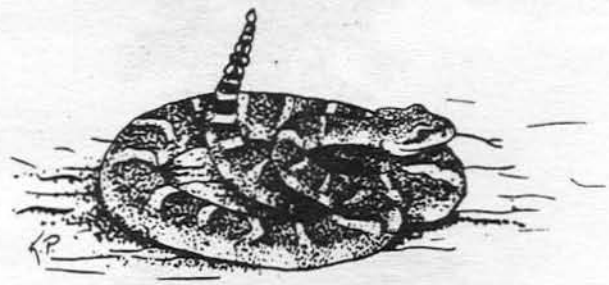
A man knelt on a low bench 20 feet above the wide part of a valley. He knew that a horse or a vehicle could not catch the speedy pronghorn, but a dangling feather would bring them close enough to shoot. A good-sized doe approached to within 50 feet. The magazine was loaded, and he knew he would not miss as he sighted on the doe. He took aim at the beautiful animal and slowly squeezed—click. Then more clicks. He got off five shots before the herd bolted and in seconds were beyond the range of his camera. He smiled—he felt the circle close. The pronghorn that were near extinction had grown back to over half a million and were being introduced into areas they had been gone from for over 100 years.

An Article on Rattlers
by Marlene Testaguzza

I found the following article from *Natural History* (May 1989 issue) fascinating, because I believe the described interactions between ground squirrels and rattlesnakes also occur in Coe Park. The primary ingredient for these interactions is present: a most likely long association between ground squirrels and rattlesnakes.

In fact, the observation made by Dave Sellers in the June 1989 issue of *The Ponderosa* lends credence to my theory. A squirrel (quite possibly a female) was being followed by a large rattlesnake. She was "chattering at the snake and wagging [her] tail in an agitated manner." If she wasn't concerned about something other than herself, why the encounter? She could easily have run away.

More of such sightings could support or add to existing behavioral data and further contribute to the geographical base. Any information or photographs of these interactions would be most welcome. Please send or bring them to the Coe Park headquarters.



Rattler Battlers[1]
by Richard G. Coss and Donald H. Owings

With evolution on their side, some California ground squirrels stand up to snakes.

The ground squirrel, an adult female, kicked dirt and leaf litter at the rattlesnake coiled in one of the many entrances to her burrow. But when the heads of two of her pups appeared at another tunnel entrance some twenty-five feet away, she abandoned her attack and joined them. The snake waited, then began to crawl toward the burrow. Quickly moving to meet her opponent head-on, the mother was followed by one of the pups. A harsh maternal chatter sent the pup bolting, but to the burrow entrance nearest the snake. The snake struck. The pup staggered some twenty feet to a third entrance, where the mother joined it, still calling. As the snake crawled toward them, the mother turned to block the burrow entrance, kicking dirt even after she was forced to back off. The snake was by this time close enough to strike defensively, but the squirrel jumped out of the way, allowing the snake to enter the burrow and eat the pup. Only then did the mother go back to the burrow mouth where the snake had first appeared and remove two live pups and one dead one—apparently an earlier victim of the same snake. She then carried her young off to another burrow about twenty-five yards away.

In the foothills surrounding the Central Valley of California, some fifteen miles northeast of San Jose, encounters with rattlesnakes are common. In the spring and early summer—just as California ground squirrel pups are emerging from their burrows and making the transition from mother's milk to solid food—rattlesnakes move down from their hillside hibernacula in search of prey. Red-tailed hawks, golden eagles, coyotes, bobcats, and badgers also rear their offspring at this time, and they all exploit young squirrels as a source of food for that task.

Each of these predators hunts in a different way, posing

different problems for the squirrels. The sudden appearance of a low, fast-flying eagle or hawk is the most immediate danger. Ground squirrels respond by emitting a single whistle and running to a burrow entrance, where they maintain a low posture as they observe the bird's direction of flight. Paul Sherman of Cornell University theorizes that whistling while running may prompt other squirrels—twenty or thirty may live in the vicinity—to run for cover, thereby diverting the predator and reducing the whistler's risk of being caught. Squirrels also run to the vicinity of burrows after spotting a bobcat or coyote at a distance. Under these less urgent circumstances, they stand on their hind legs or even mount a boulder to scan and chatter.

Snakes present a different threat. They can enter and even take up temporary residence in a squirrel's burrows, but unlike bird and mammalian predators, snakes are too slow-moving to keep pace with fleeing prey. Upon seeing a snake, a squirrel can afford to make a conspicuous display and even engage in occasional combat: fluffing and waving its tail, kicking dirt, and even biting its adversaries. Altercations between squirrels and venomous snakes can go on for several minutes, with squirrels approaching to well within striking range and sometimes even touching noses with a snake poised to strike. Despite the apparent high risk of these encounters, an adult ground squirrel may not be risking its life by holding its ground against a rattlesnake.

We found that adult ground squirrels were rarely bitten, and when they were, they showed no sign of serious pain or injury. Leaping back quickly seemed to detach the embedded fangs and minimize the venom dose. But more important, as Naomie Poran of the University of California, Davis, found, was that ground squirrels, especially populations in the rattlesnake-abundant foothills surrounding the Central Valley of California, have blood proteins with strong natural resistance to rattlesnake venom. The level of resistance in some squirrel populations is so high that the typical rattlesnake could not deliver a lethal dose to an adult. Pups in our Camp Ohlone study site near San Jose have adult levels of these venom-neutralizing proteins when they are thirty days old (approximately fifteen days before first emergence from nursery burrows). But even their venom tolerance can't protect small pups from being critically wounded by snake bites. Rattlesnakes, therefore, seek out the nursery burrows where vulnerable young squirrel pups hide.

Since the snakes may temporarily live, as well as feed, in the ground squirrel burrows, we believe they learn the location of the nursery burrows in their home range. (Some rattlesnakes in our study area have hunted the same colony for at least four years.) As they move about, they check the burrow entrances for pups. David Hennessy of the University of California, Davis, has concluded that the rattlesnakes at Camp Ohlone also use a more sophisticated means—"interrogating" the mother—to aid their search. Hennessy found that early in the hunt, a hungry snake often focuses its attention on a single adult squirrel. The snake may come close enough to touch or even lunge at the adult, or it may crawl about, repeatedly approaching and withdrawing, seemingly using the adult as the hub of a radial searching pattern. In either case, the rattlesnake seems to monitor the adult's behavior, waiting for a response that might reveal which burrow contains pups. But the mother seems to resist the "interrogation," neither reacting to nor harassing the snake until it appears likely to discover the pups' burrow. In one case, the mother's tail flagging decreased as the snake neared her nursery burrow, just the reverse of what we expected, perhaps to deceive the snake.

Squirrels also interrogate snakes. A squirrel may kick dirt at a snake coiled in the vicinity of a burrow entrance to ascertain whether the snake is resting or lying in ambush. To find out how squirrels keep track of snakes underground, we constructed a burrow in our laboratory and recorded the squirrels' responses on videotape. Whenever a rattlesnake (rendered nonvenomous) was placed in the artificial burrow, the squirrels smelled it immediately and began to advance through the tunnel, spraying sand ahead of them as they proceeded. The snake's reaction to being hit by the sand betrayed its location. The squirrels repeatedly returned to the vicinity of the snake's first appearance, keeping track of its position.

Above ground, squirrels remain alert at burrow entrances, tracking a snake's movements whenever one is in the area. At times, persistent tail flagging by one squirrel recruits neighbors. This behavior attracts others, which then follow the snake. If squirrels lose sight of a snake within their home range, they begin to search systematically, checking sites that snakes are likely to occupy—burrow entrances, shady boulder crevices and ledges, and dense vegetation. During late spring and early summer, when snakes are abundant, squirrels behave as though they expect to find a snake whether they have seen one recently or not. They pause and extend their muzzles before they enter any potential hiding place, often flagging their tails before going in.

No doubt learning influences much of the squirrels' specific knowledge about snakes in particular circumstances. But even pups reared in the laboratory quickly recognize snakes on first contact and behave as though they know how to deal with them. They fluff and flag their tails, approach cautiously, extend their muzzles, throw sand, and leap sideways intermittently, as if expecting the snake to strike. Pups are also adept at detecting snakes in the burrow, apparently by smelling and listening, and when they find one, they quickly back away, gather a mound of sand, and plug the tunnel, compressing the sand by ramming it with their heads.

Although they rarely have to deal with a snake alone (adults confront the snakes while the pups typically remain at a distance), pups without adults nearby behave like adults. Where rattlesnakes are prevalent, pups emerge from their nursery burrows for the first time already behaving as though they expect to find snakes. As they encounter snakelike sticks, curled leaves, and small rounded stones, they sometimes pause and flag their tails, especially before entering

clumps of dense vegetation that could conceal snakes.

In the laboratory, we found that pups that had never seen snakes (although we trapped their mothers near rattlesnake-abundant Camp Ohlone) could, in the absence of their mothers, distinguish rattlesnakes from nonvenomous gopher snakes. Like adults, pups spent more time within striking range investigating a rattlesnake than they did a gopher snake. Squirrel pups from a virtually rattlesnake-free habitat, such as those on our University of California, Davis, campus, also discriminated rattlesnakes from gopher snakes, but engaged their natural enemy, the gopher snake, as if it were more relevant.

These behavioral differences may reflect distinct evolutionary histories. To find out, we examined how natural selection may have altered defenses against snake predation. We first developed a molecular clock to estimate how long thirty-one ground squirrel populations in California and Oregon have been isolated from one another (see "Nature's Family Archives," *Natural History*, March 1989). Then we measured the genetic distances between two groups of squirrels—five populations just north and five just south of San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento River—and used geological information to estimate how long these bodies of water blocked gene flow between the two. The results suggested that gene flow among other ground squirrel populations was periodically disrupted near the height of glacial periods.

We then measured the rattlesnake venom neutralizing capacity of nineteen squirrel populations, some in rattlesnake-abundant habitats and others where rattlesnakes are rare or absent. Using fossil, geographical, and geological information to assess the current and historical overlap in the distributions of rattlesnakes, gopher snakes, and ground squirrels, we discovered that venom resistance declines in proportion to the estimated time spent in rattlesnake-free habitats. The Davis squirrels, for example, which have had virtually no contact with rattlesnakes for some 9,000 years, show a small decline in venom resistance compared with their closest relatives in the rattlesnake-abundant Coast Range foothills. High-elevation populations in the Sierra Nevada have been virtually free of rattlesnake predation for about 70,000 years and show a much greater loss. And after about 80,000 years of isolation from rattlesnakes, the squirrels' venom resistance disappears.

Behavioral responses to snakes—such as tail flagging, biting, and kicking—seem to have evolved differently from that of venom resistance. Judging from fossil evidence and current rattlesnake distribution, the squirrel populations of Folsom Lake in the rattlesnake-abundant Sierra Nevada foothills have been preyed upon consistently by rattlesnakes at least from the last Ice Age (late Pleistocene) and are the most venom resistant of all populations sampled. Venom resistance is only marginal in ground squirrels that migrated into the Lake Tahoe basin in the last 10,000 years but that had been isolated from the nearest rattlesnake and gopher snake selected populations for about 60,000 years before that. Ground squirrels from Mount Shasta in far northern California diverged from other populations preyed upon by rattlesnakes about 300,000 years ago and have no venom resistance. Yet in laboratory encounters with a caged rattlesnake, ground squirrels from all three populations behaved the same way: all fluffed and flagged their tails and threw sand. Nevertheless, the Folsom Lake squirrels appeared to manage the snake's behavior more skillfully. Mount Shasta squirrels recklessly harassed the snake, provoking more strikes than either of the other populations did.

After prolonged absence of predation, the coordinated system of behavioral and physiological defenses against rattlesnakes is lost. Squirrels continue to confront rattlesnakes but it is much riskier. Our genetic studies suggest that after the end of the last Ice Age, squirrels related to Mount Shasta populations moved farther into Oregon. According to herpetologist Rodney McCallum, rattlesnakes on Rattlesnake Mountain near Monroe, Oregon, eat large adult ground squirrels. Lack of resistance, combined with reckless behavior, has made adults feasible prey once again. If such predation continues for many generations, venom resistance may reappear in this population.

Why should the harassing behavior persist after the physiological advantage has dissipated? We can speculate that random genetic mutations have a greater impact on venom-neutralizing proteins in the blood than on behavioral systems that are buffered by developmental processes involving many more genes. Since the acute senses and behavioral flexibility needed to evade snakes are also necessary to find food and mates or fight other squirrels, a complex behavioral pattern is less likely to fade over time than a single physical trait. Mount Shasta and Lake Tahoe squirrels might be said to retain a Pleistocene "memory" of rattlesnakes.

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[1] With permission from Natural History, May 1989; copyrighted by the American Museum of Natural History, 1989.

The Schafer Corral Trail

by Winslow R. Briggs

If you are headed in the direction of Little Long Canyon, Rock House Ridge, or any of a number of more distant and equally fascinating objectives, the mouth of Rock House Canyon where Rock House Creek joins the East Fork of Coyote Creek is a key intersection. The usual way to get there from the Coe Park headquarters is to start out on the **Pacheco Route**, descend to Poverty Flat, and continue by following the Pacheco Route over Jackass Pass. You then drop a bit, climb past a second high point, the junction with **Jackass Trail**, and then drop about 150 feet to the junction of the Pacheco Route with **Miller Trail**. Miller Trail (which actually continues straight ahead, while the Pacheco Route makes a sharp turn to the right) leads you around the end of Blue Ridge, climbing about 250 feet in the process of bringing you to another major junction, this time with the **Northern Heights Route**. From this ridge-top junction, you follow the Northern Heights Route as it drops westward along an increasingly steep ridge, swinging down to Rock

House Canyon a few scant yards from the mouth of Rock House Creek, a total loss of altitude of about 340 feet.

The above route, described elsewhere,[2] leads you almost 180 degrees around the entire southeastern end of Blue Ridge and provides wonderful open panoramas up Kelly Cabin Canyon to the south, along the face of Willow Ridge to the east, and far up into the complex drainages of the East Fork of Coyote Creek to the northeast. Your rambling here will also take you into a cool and wooded lateral canyon deeply carved by one of the many streams draining the flanks of Blue Ridge. (This canyon is the occasional home of numerous squealing pigs.)

If you are doing a long hike, however, and are anxious to minimize anything that will force you uphill, you can avoid the 250-foot climb very easily—provided the East Fork of Coyote Creek is reasonably below raging torrent status. Your alternative—and a nice one it is—is to follow **Schafer Trail**. If you take it, you'll explore a lovely stretch of broad canyon bottom, pass several interesting rock formations, and reduce your climbing from 250 feet to something nearer 40! You also won't see very many people. You could actually have the best of both worlds by following Miller Trail out and Schafer Trail back—or the other way around, although the first way might be preferable, since you'll get some of the climbing over earlier in the day.

You actually find Schafer Trail by following Miller Trail for about a hundred yards from the Pacheco Route Junction. At the bottom of a fairly sharp drop and just on the far side of a small drainage is a locked gate across a track leading off to the right. This gate marks the west end of Schafer Trail. After passing around the gate through a gap to its left, the trail climbs a few feet to cross a small saddle. There is a low rock outcrop to your right, separating you from the little canyon you just crossed, and the clump of bay trees covering it is a sure sign that the rock formation somehow regularly traps a healthy supply of water someplace not too deep below the surface—such tree-covered rocky outcrops surrounded by relatively open meadow are a common feature in Coe. Directly ahead of you on the skyline are the scruffy Gray Pines that give conical Eagle Pines the second half of its name. The route soon swings around a broad meadowy shoulder, passes between two lonely blue oaks, crosses a short dip, and heads back to the right. Thus far you haven't lost very much altitude. Gradually, however, the slope drops away in front of you, and you are headed down a progressively steepening grade directly toward the East Fork. The meadowy flank you are on narrows gradually, and soon you are making your way straight down the crest of a small ridge. The track you are on actually reaches the East Fork just at the mouth of another small canyon—marked with its own narrow grove of trees. Just before you complete the knee-jarring final portion of the descent, there is a small rock formation between you and the lateral canyon, standing guard over its mouth.

You have reached the East Fork just above the downstream end of a broad open bed of gravel, a flat surface over 30 yards wide and well over a hundred yards long. Not far downstream the valley floor narrows, and its surface is punctured by several small rock towers. At this point, you are roughly a mile from the mouth of Rock House Canyon, with a 40-foot ascent still ahead of you (spread out so completely that it is unlikely you'll notice you are climbing).

As you start upstream (headed north), watch for a splendid triangular rock on your left, perhaps 20 or more feet in height, and set somewhat back from the margin of the creekbed. Numerous large colonies of gray-green and orange lichens have conspired to create a lovely mosaic of color over most of the surface facing you. You have to splash across to the Willow Ridge side of the East Fork, and before long you are at the end of the broad stretch. As the creekbed narrows, the Blue Ridge side becomes progressively steeper and cliff-like. You soon climb a few vertical feet out of the streambed into a shady mixture of oak and Gray Pine, only to drop almost immediately back to gravel as the creekbed widens again. In making about a quarter of a mile of progress upstream, you have headed gradually east, following the broad sweep of the valley. However, by the time you reach the open gravel again, you are headed back northwest. Only a couple of hundred yards away on the Blue Ridge side of the creek is Schafer Corral.

The trail crosses the creek again and heads more or less up the center of the gravel flat, a surface twice as wide and twice as long as the one you just left. (You can be compulsive and follow the track closely, but it is really possible to go almost anywhere between the banks, especially during the dry season.) Although Schafer Corral is situated on a lovely spot, a flat promontory on the inside of a broad curve in the creekbed, it really doesn't have much to offer as a camp site. There is indeed a usable corral and a somewhat dilapidated pit toilet, but there is altogether too much tangled barbed wire, broken fencing, and other debris to make the site attractive. (If when you visit Schafer Corral in the future you find the situation changed, thank any of the many dozens of Pine Ridge Association volunteers. They have carried out countless cleanup projects in Coe and are almost certainly responsible for this one. If not, you could always volunteer to lead a cleanup project yourself! You'll find lots of willing participants.)

By making a long sweep to the left, the valley—and your route—reassumes a fairly strict north-south orientation as you continue upstream. The wide bed of gravel persists for almost an eighth of a mile, passing a low rocky rib to the left. Note also the great rock outcrop high above you on the Willow Ridge side of the creek. This striking landmark, clearly visible from below, is hard to spot from a great distance despite its stature, since its sharply pointed summit is somewhat below the crest of the ridge. Soon the rocky rib on the left gives way to a lovely open meadow punctuated with occasional oaks and Gray Pines. As in many parts of Coe, opposite stream banks have entirely different vegetation, and this stretch of the East Fork is no exception. Instead of open meadows, the steep terrain to the right is dotted with dark clumps of chaparral—indicative of a much

more stressful environment. The soil is rocky with poor water-holding characteristics, and the slope is at the mercy of the hot afternoon sun—conditions that the tough chaparral shrubs survive better than do the less tolerant meadow grasses, Gray Pines, and oaks.

The broad gravel surface finally narrows, the track crosses a couple of stream channels, and you leave the streambed entirely to cross a rocky meadowy spur behind a low rock outcrop that separates you from the stream. You are back to the creek after a few yards, however, and shortly cross it not far from some interesting tilted layers of rock in the streambed. (This rock formation is not dissimilar to one found in the Narrows of the East Fork just before it joins the Main Fork of Coyote Creek.) The slope to your right is now almost solid Gray Pine forest, silvery gray-green in appearance and especially magical in the early morning or late afternoon sunlight.

In minutes you make another stream crossing, pass a battered willow, and head straight north up a gravel bed that could comfortably accommodate an eight-lane divided highway. The stream meanders a bit, you have water underfoot once or twice more, and the trail winds up on the east side just before coming to a cabin that belongs to an inholder (please respect private property!). You then follow the east bank the remaining hundred yards or so to the mouth of Rock House Canyon, crossing over to join the Northern Heights Route right at the canyon entrance. Note the knobby base of a sycamore maple just before the final crossing—another tree that can tolerate occasional bouts with swirling and angry floodwaters.

What you do next depends upon several considerations: (a) the time of day, (b) your physical condition, (c) the physical conditions of your fellow hikers, (d) how much water you have left (a moot point if you are equipped to purify your own water), (e) whether you like valleys or ridges, and (f) whether you want to retrace your steps or are anxious to make a small loop. You actually have four choices: First, you could go straight north and explore Little Long Canyon, a total of about four miles up and back and a modest climb of about 200 feet. Second, you could ascend Rock House Ridge to Hat Rock via an inviting trail leading up the ridge behind a gate to your right, a total of five miles out and back and a not so modest climb of almost 1,450 feet. Third, you could head back toward the Coe Park headquarters by first ascending the Northern Heights Route for about half a mile (a 340-foot climb) and then returning via Miller Trail and the Pacheco Route. Finally (a less strenuous and slightly shorter way home), you could simply go back the way you came. Choose carefully: you are over six and a half miles from your car, and the easiest route back still requires than you climb more than 2,000 feet!

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[2] "The High Road to Rock House Canyon" in Briggs, The Trails of Henry W. Coe State Park, 2nd ed., 1990; also "Up Long Canyon—A Lonely Place: To the Confluence of Rock House Canyon and the East Fork of Coyote Creek" in the March 1988 issue of The Ponderosa.

1990: The Year of the Oak

by Mike Monroe

Can you imagine Coe Park without any oak trees? They are such dominant features of the landscape that a vision of grasslands and ridges without oaks seems implausible. Fortunately, the protection afforded the trees in Coe Park makes my original question mostly rhetorical.

Round-crowned oaks scattered over the rolling hills of California are a symbol of the state. Both past and present day travelers have stopped to enjoy the beauty of our native oak trees with their spreading, weathered branches. California has been blessed with eighteen native species of oaks, seemingly in abundance.

The reality today, however, is that several oak species are not regenerating well, and entire oak groves are being lost to land development. Because of these threats to California's oak woodlands, the state legislature has designated 1990 as the "Year of the Oak." The intent of the proclamation is to help focus public attention and interest toward our oak tree heritage through educational programs and publications and by promoting tree plantings in both urban, rural, and wilderness settings.

A few relevant passages from the Senate resolution follow:

> "Whereas, the continued health of oak woodlands is an indication of California's balance with its rural environment; and
>
> Whereas, California's oak woodlands provide forage and habitat for hundreds of species of wildlife, and visual enjoyment to residents and visitors to the state; and
>
> Whereas, more than one million acres of oak woodlands have been lost since 1945, and the losses continue due to intensive conversion to agriculture and urban encroachment; and
>
> Whereas, there are only 274,000 acres of valley oak left in California, which is unique to this state and the most vulnerable to extinction."

As the year progresses, I will feature more articles about oak trees and about their home in Coe Park. My hope is that, as we learn more about our wonderful oak trees, we will more fully appreciate their special role in our environment.

PRA members interested in obtaining information about the Year of the Oak can contact me at (408) 848-5624. Much of my information comes from the California Native Plant Society, the California Oak Foundation, the California Department of Fish and Game, and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

PRA Board Notes
by Barbara Bessey

The PRA Board of Directors met on Thursday, March 22, at the home of Dave Hildebrand. Chair Bonnie Larsen led a discussion of the organization's four primary goals for 1990: sponsor the Volunteer Program to provide educational and interpretative services, promote public awareness of Coe Park through education, provide interpretative resources, and develop an involved and supportive PRA membership. The activities to be carried out to implement each goal, as well as the individuals responsible for ensuring that these activities are carried out, were specified.

Three proposals for PRA funds were made and approved. Roberta Wright received funding to build additional tables to be used at PRA functions, including Mother's Day Breakfasts, Ride-a-Longs, training sessions, and trail days. Kevin Gilmartin and Barbara Bessey received funding to develop a training program to be used for both volunteers and the general public on identifying birds by sight and sound. Bonnie Larsen's proposal for the prize to be awarded for the winning postcard slide was also approved.

Bill Frazer raised the question as to whether the PRA should join a statewide volunteer organization. Apparently the Pine Ridge Association had been a member at one time in the past. He and Derek Smith were tasked with exploring the compatibility of the goals of both organizations and to make a recommendation about the desirability of rejoining the statewide League of Nonprofit Organizations.

Barbara Bessey raised the issue of defining several different donor levels for membership in the Association. She, along with Kevin Gilmartin and Margaret Enns, were tasked with reviewing the issue further and making recommendations as appropriate.

Updates on a number of other PRA activities were made. Winslow Briggs reported that progress was slow toward completing the new park map, but he was hopeful that the project would be completed within the next few months. Prospects for the traveling art show were discussed, with Winslow Briggs and Dave Hildebrand making suggestions about possible locations. Updates on *The Ponderosa* were made by Dave Hildebrand and Barbara Bessey. The Board approved the proposal to increase the number of issues. It appears likely that the bulk mailing rate will be in place before the April issue is mailed.

The next meeting of the Board will be on Tuesday, May 8, at the home of Bill Frazer. All PRA members are invited to attend. Bill's address is 17345 Oak Leaf Drive, Morgan Hill. Maps are available from the Recording Secretary (415/851-7813).

Interpretative Programs for the Public

Did you know that most of the interpretative walks and programs at the park are put on by Coe Park volunteers? These individuals, for the most part, are not naturalists or scientists. They are simply people who enjoy plants and animals, the out-of-doors, and Coe Park, and they want to learn more about them. They then try to share their learning and their enthusiasm for the park with the public during the scheduled walks, hikes, and evening programs. This year's Interpretative Program Coordinator, Larry Haimowitz, organized a series of activities designed to assist volunteers with planning and preparing programs for the public. In the next article, a member of the 1988 class of Coe Park volunteers shares her experiences as she begins the process of preparing an interpretative program for the public.

Preparing Interpretative Programs
by Duane O'Sullivan

Learning to put an interpretative walk together and make it presentable to the public can be fun.

Several of us Coe Park volunteers met with Larry Haimowitz to learn how to be "creative." Our first project was learning the difference between a "title" and a "theme." What a job! Making a title flow evenly through a theme is hard work. Each of us brainstormed good ideas for titles and themes; of course, there were bad ones also, and laughter was shared by all.

Our assignment for our next meeting was to attend an interpretative lecture. Three of us attended a lecture at Hellyer Park in San Jose. The title was "Slimy, Creepy Crawlers." The theme was the adaptation of these creatures at Hellyer Park. (The lecture, I might add, was outstanding.) The ranger's title and theme flowed evenly through the entire presentation.

Our next activity was an interpretative walk at Coe Park. Our guides were Larry Haimowitz and Jim Covell, the volunteer coordinator at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. It was a great day—rain, rain, and more rain! However, being Coe Park volunteers meant that we proceeded forward equipped in rain gear and boots. We learned about the wondrous animal life, about scat droppings, and about the plant communities that we all hold close to us.

This was a very enjoyable series of learning experiences. I have now selected a title and a theme for my interpretative walk, which I will share with you in a future issue of the newsletter.

Teach Them Well—
The Future Is in Their Hands
by Frank Bath

In addition to my 21-year-old "adult" son, I am the proud father of one teenage daughter and one soon-to-be teenage son, and I am sure many of you share with me the worries and concerns of raising children in present day California. Not only are they subjected to tremendous peer pressure at school and from friends, they are bombarded by violence and commercialism through the various media channels. Yet it is this generation that will face tremendous challenges as to how to balance the needs of a materialistic society against those of a very fragile environment with the prize being the long-term survival of the world as we know it today.

If you believe the "doom and gloom" crowd, we are indeed going to continue on a path of self-destruction by destroying the environment and raising a bunch of Silicon Valley yuppie clones whose environmental concerns are limited to how much money they can make from it.

However I, and I hope you, have always had faith in human destiny, and there is some evidence that this faith is justified. For example, I think we have already begun to see a lessening of the materialistic excesses of the eighties. As someone who was a teenager in Europe in the early sixties under what seemed a very real threat of nuclear war, I have literally cried for joy when I see the changes happening in Eastern Europe, which even a few months ago would not have seemed possible. Undoubtedly the single most dangerous long-term threat to this planet is how we treat the environment. Just as the strength of the human spirit has prevailed in countries like Rumania, the battle over the environment will be won also.

To return to my original theme, how are we as parents to encourage the movement away from materialism and ensure we can guide our children in the right direction? What role can Henry Coe and other state parks play? There are many lessons to be learned from parks like Coe, but I believe a great start is to learn to appreciate the great beauty that is around us. And we Californians are much luckier than most and, therefore, have a greater burden to carry. F. Scott Fitzgerald once stated that the whole continent was the last piece of terrain wild and beautiful enough to be commensurate with our capacity for wonder. Unfortunately, less and less of the continent continues to meet that description, and much of it is too far from population centers for many people to benefit from it.

Yet 15 miles east of Highway 101 there is approximately 100 square miles of wild and beautiful terrain that we, as PRA members, do appreciate and that does fulfill our capacity for wonder. But teenagers?? Come on, they think they have better things to do, given everything modern society has to offer.

My daughter will probably hate me for doing this, but I would like to use her as an example. Despite being born in England, my daughter is the perfect example of an "all-American" teenager; she is a cheer leader, has a grade-point average that is slightly above average, and her mind is mostly on beings of the opposite gender. She was first introduced to Coe just after I joined the volunteer organization at Coe Park[3] and has been up there a number of times since; she even went on an "overnighter" to Poverty Flat. What has encouraged and thrilled me is her obvious love for the park and that it has taken very little exposure to sensitize her to its beauty and to start the thought processes that have to happen in all of us if we are to become the custodians for such wild and beautiful places.

Nature provided the wonder, and I can take little credit in this awakening, since I joined the Coe Park volunteers for what were essentially selfish reasons. Yet this selfish act has taught me many things, such as the fact that young people will appreciate natural and nonmaterialistic things providing they are exposed to them.

I was lucky enough to be brought up in the country, and therefore my parents did not have to consciously expose me to the beauty around me. To some extent the same is true of living in Morgan Hill. But I lived for eleven years in San Jose prior to that, and it is quite possible to live all your life there on crowded freeways, near shopping malls, and in nice manicured gardens—hardly the right environment to encourage the custodians of the future.

Maybe I am a little naive, but I believe it is vital that we do all we can to encourage the young to visit Coe Park and find out for themselves what we have found out already. In fact, as members of the Pine Ridge Association, it is our responsibility. This encouragement should not be confined to our own children but should include youth groups to which they belong and friends and associates. We will not convert them all, but if we do not try, we will be failing in our responsibility as human beings and custodian of this great planet. Then maybe if we could come back in 100 years, we could truly be proud of the legacy that Sada Coe started and we helped nurture and preserve.

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[3] If you would like to join the other PRA members who are part of the Coe Park volunteers, don't miss the summer and fall issues of The Ponderosa, which will feature articles about the Coe Park Volunteer Program. Eds.

Kid's Day at Coe Park

This year, Kid's Day at Coe Park will take place on Sunday, May 20. This very popular event is being organized by Larry Haimowitz. Last year, children from toddlers to teenagers enjoyed homemade ice cream, heard Indian tales, and participated in nature-oriented activities. A good time was enjoyed by the children and their parents.

As of press time, Larry indicated that he and his committee could use a few more willing workers. If you enjoy working with children and would like to take part in this very special

event, please call Larry (408/778-6088).

This event is specially tailored to provide a meaningful and delightful outdoors experience for all children—from toddlers to teenagers—and their parents. Don't miss it! Please call Coe Park after May 1 to learn the details about Kid's Day.

Photographers Alert!
by Bonnie Larsen

The photo contest for the Coe postcard is still on, but time is running short. You should submit your slides to Ranger Barry Breckling by June 30.

The winning photo will be determined by the people at Earthshine Postcards of Santa Rosa. If no slides are considered suitable, there will be no winner, and we will have to solicit more slides if we want a Coe postcard. Submitting one or more slides now makes it more likely that Coe will get a postcard this year.

The person who submits the winning slide will receive a grand prize—a framed 11 x 14 enlargement of the winning photograph courtesy of the Pine Ridge Association, plus a dozen genuine postcards.

> Spring is sprung.
> The time is now.
> We need a Coe card.
> And how.

(Failure to submit slides could result in more of this type of poetry. Think about it!)

Chairperson Wanted!
by Margaret Enns

WANTED!!!! Chairperson for the Pine Ridge Association's Annual Fall Barbecue. The BBQ will be held this year on Saturday, September 22. There are 22 eager persons signed up to work on the BBQ, and they need a leader. Please call Barry Breckling = Big Chief Coe Park Ranger (408/779-2728) or Bonnie Larsen = Big Chief Pine Ridge Association President (408/779-7785) if you hear the call.

Artists and Illustrators Take Heed!

The staff of *The Ponderosa* would like to include drawings and illustrations to accompany the articles included in each issue. While many appropriate illustrations can be found in nature books and magazines, we will not violate copyright laws by reproducing drawings from already published material without permission of the publishers. We have therefore decided to solicit contributions from the PRA membership. We are seeking individuals who would be interested in periodically preparing drawings or simple illustrations that we could include in the newsletter. Simple line drawings or illustrations (rather than photographs or paintings) work best due to the reproduction process we use for the newsletter.

For each drawing that we print, we will include the name of the artist as part of our staff listed on the last page. If you would like to assist us by contributing illustrations from time to time, please indicate your interest by calling or writing the editors (415/851-7813 or 127 Glenwood Avenue, Woodside, CA 94062).

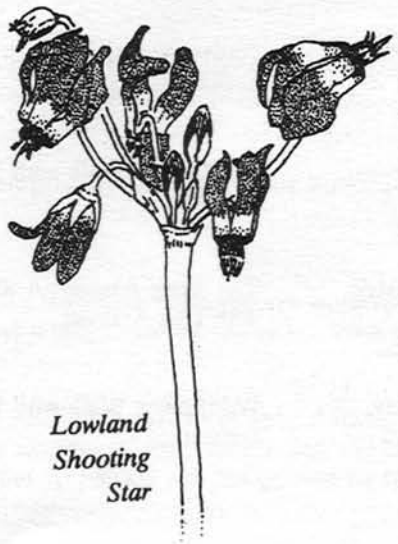
For Sale in the Visitor Center

The Pine Ridge Association's new publication entitled *Fishing at Henry W. Coe State Park* (1989) is now on sale at the visitor center. Written by Barry Breckling, with art work by Saelon Renkes and produced by Dave Hildebrand, this booklet is a must for anyone who would like to explore one of the park's many fishing spots. The fishing regulations in effect in the park are provided, followed by pictures and descriptions of each of the species of fish that are likely to be caught. The booklet concludes with a discussion of the fishing areas, including their distances (and hiking times) and elevation gains from headquarters, the types of fish caught in that pond or lake, and other notes of interest for that location.

All of this information is packaged at a small selling price. The price is only $1.00 including tax (minus a 10-percent discount for PRA members).

Renewal Notice

Don't miss another issue of *The Ponderosa*—renew today. The date next to your name on the mailing label tells you whether it is time to renew. If the year is 1989, this issue will be your last unless we hear from you. Please send your dues to Coe Park Headquarters ($5 individual, $8 family, and $200 life).



Lowland Shooting Star

Spring Programs at Henry Coe State Park

Free to the Public

All walks start at 1 pm on Saturdays or Sundays at the visitors center and will generally be easy strolls about one hour long. Slide programs at 8 pm on Saturdays are shown in the interpretative room (downstairs and around back from the visitors center) and last 30 to 60 minutes.

Date/Time	Topic and Leader	Details
Saturday, April 21 1 pm	Demonstration of Backpacking Equipment by Lee Sims and Discovery Hike with Bob North	This doubleheader will show you what you might want to take backpacking, after which you can accompany Bob in search of nearby naturalistic subjects.
Saturday, April 21 8 pm	Backpacking in Coe with Evelyn Newman: A Slide Show	Evelyn's shows various places in Coe's 105 square miles that might become the sites of your future backpacking trips.
Sunday, April 22 1 pm	Wildflower Walk with Derek Smith	Join Derek for some light exercise and the strange tale of the dance in which our wildflowers and rainfall have joined this year.
Saturday, April 28 1 pm	Discovery Hike with Bob North	Bob is an entomologist (bugs) and research diver. Help him discover the fascination that dry land holds for us landlubbers.
Saturday, April 28 8 pm	The Four Seasons of Coe with Marlene Testaquzza	Marlene's slides will give you the chance to discover what it is like year round at Coe without having to endure the discomfort of summer heat or winter snow.
Sunday, April 29 1 pm	Native Americans with David Sellers	Take a short walk with David and explore the lives of the people who knew the land before us.
Saturday, May 5 1 pm	Wildflower Walk with Milovan Milutin	The wildflower show will be at its peak, and Milovan is also knowledgeable about the various grasses found in the park.
Saturday, May 5 8 pm	The Skies Above—A Slide Show with Phil Atwood	Phil's program will feature the celestial bodies above the park, especially our new visitor—Comet Austin.
Sunday, May 6 1 pm	Wildflower Walk with Bonnie Larsen	Greet our May wildflowers with Bonnie on this short walk from the visitors center. May can be a spectacular month for wildflowers at Coe.

Date/Time	Topic and Leader	Details
Saturday, May 12 1 pm	Wildflower Walk with Susan Voss	The late-blooming wildflowers will be at their peak in May. Susan's walk will feature many species of flowers plus natural history.
Saturday, May 12 8 pm	Interpretative Program with Penny Roberts	Penny, who is employed as a cell biologist, will discuss a naturalistic topic concerning the park.
Sunday, May 13 1 pm	Wildflower Walk	Greet our mid-May wildflowers on this short walk from the visitors center.
Saturday, May 19 1 pm	Wildflower Walk with Dennis Pinion	In addition to the beautiful wildflowers, Dennis is knowledgeable about the ponderosa pines, the gray pines, and the California junipers in the park.
Saturday, May 19 8 pm	A Slide Program—to be announced	One of the park's volunteer naturalists or anthropologists will present a talk based on his or her area of expertise.
Sunday, May 20 1 pm	Hug-a-Tree with Robert Buchner	Bob will teach your children what to do if they get lost—a program designed to help save lives and make hiking a safer activity for children.
Saturday, May 26 1 pm	A Surprise Walk with Margaret Enns	Margaret will discuss Coe's natural environment while leading a group on a short discovery hike.
Saturday, May 26 8 pm	Reptiles and Amphibians with Gary Keller	Gary was one of the early volunteers at the park and has been discussing snakes, salamanders, and other "low life" for many years.
Sunday, May 27 1 pm	Discovery Walk with Jeff Swindle	Jeff, who is Park Aid and has applied to become a ranger, has studied ecological systems and is especially knowledgeable about the birds found in the park.
Saturday, June 2 1 pm	Discovery Hike—leader and topic to be announced	Come and be surprised—this exploratory walk is sure to be fun!
Saturday, June 2 8 pm	A Slide Program—topic to be announced	One of the park's volunteer naturalists or anthropologists will present a talk based on his or her area of expertise.
Sunday, June 3 1 pm	Wildflower Walk with Bonnie Larsen	Join Bonnie in greeting the late bloomers and saying farewell to the spring wildflower parade.
Saturday, June 9 1 pm	Discovery Hike—leader and topic to be announced	Come and be surprised—this exploratory walk is sure to be fun!
Saturday, June 9 8 pm	A Slide Program—topic to be announced	One of the park's volunteer naturalists or anthropologists will present a talk based on his or her area of expertise.
Sunday, June 10 1 pm	Animal Tracking with Ranger Barry Breckling	Barry will help you find a variety of animal tracks in the dusty roads near the visitors center and will talk about to tell what an animal was doing from its tracks.

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The Ponderosa is a periodic publication of the Pine Ridge Association. Its mission is to enhance and enrich the public's experience at Henry W. Coe State Park through education and interpretation.