The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter

April 1992

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

The Special Spring

Surely the three years of drought were too much for the ponderosa pine that stood at the edge of the grassy, brown meadow. Its needles were still dark green and glistened in the bright sun like the life-filled eyes of a woman in love, but just under the bark, tiny beetles had started their work of girdling the cambium layer. Slowly, from the top down, the needles turned brown and then fiery red—its "eyes" not only changed color but became dull and glazed over. Three years with little rainfall meant that the tree couldn't produce enough sap to drown or push out the little iridescent boring beetles. The dead ponderosa remained a standing mummy as the fifth year of drought passed and hope grew that there might not be a sixth.

Progressively the snag became weaker, with weather and insects doing their proper jobs. In the third year after its death, on a Sunday morning, in an April rainstorm as a heavy wind passed over the top of the ridge, the dead pine crashed to the earth. No person heard it crash to the ground, but this does not mean that if a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, that it doesn't make a sound; quite to the contrary in this case: A half dozen browsing deer, a badger at the opening to its burrow, a pair of ground squirrels chasing each other, as well as a mountain lion nursing her two cubs all were close enough not only to hear the tree hit but to feel the ground shake as it bounded once and broke into several sections. A shiny red, white, and black mountain king snake, just out of hibernation and on the track of a mate, heard the tree land from a quarter mile away even though he did not have ears—he could hear through the sensory organs along his sides.

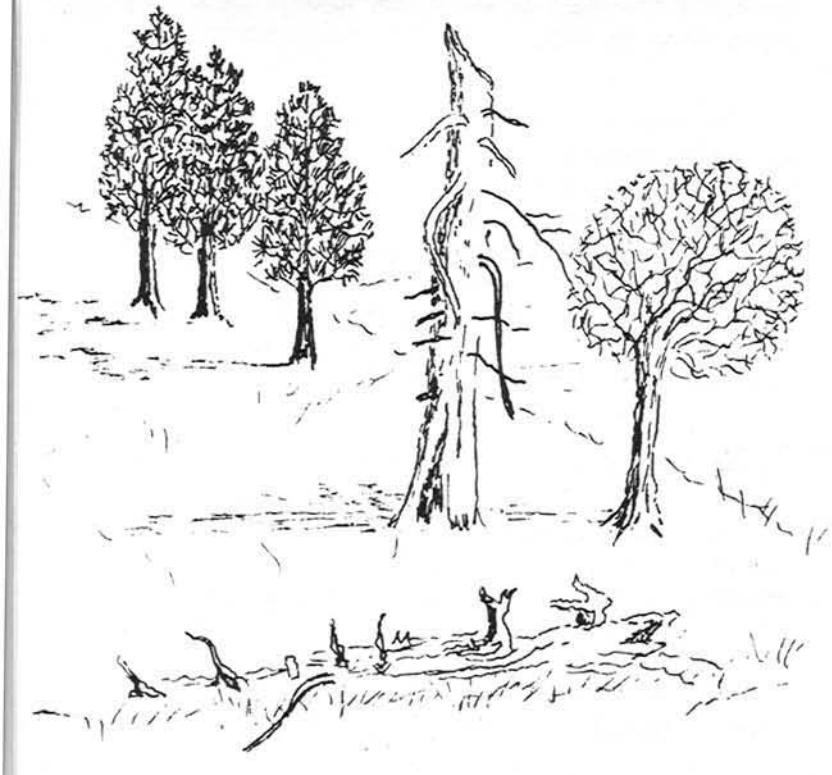
Rather obvious to some, this change was not at first noticed by others more closely tied to the tree. A red-tailed hawk being dive-bombed by a kestrel flew through the meadow towards the tree. As the redtail approached for a landing in the top of the tree, it realized that its perch was no longer standing. The kestrel, who had nested in a hole near the top of the dead snag for the past two years, was equally surprised and suddenly confused about what he was defending.

In the forest, there seemed to be silence for a moment after the tree fell. The wind continued to whistle through the tree tops and skitter over the duff; and the rain tapped on the tree trunks and pattered on the oak branches—yet there was a certain stillness, an uncommon quiet for just a moment. Just as hard times for individuals can make them stronger and better, and impurities in gold are burnt off to make it pure and beautiful, so the end result of five years of drought is stronger and more

beautiful fields and forests.

Now, with the silence comes the realization that this is not a drought year, and it is going to be a very special spring. Every coast live oak is hung with flower-filled tassels, not just some trees as in normal or even past wet years. The tassels on some live oaks start bright red, but all quickly turn to a reddish-brown, then a brown, then a shade of tan. The black oaks are also putting out tassels and in such numbers that a large oak has two million flowers or more. More astounding than the profusion of dangling tassels is the splendor of the new leaves of the black and valley oaks as they reach upward to the sun. Their colors are florescent pastels of reds, yellows, and greens, giving the slopes watercolor washes of psychedelic tones. The textures and hues of these slopes have the quality to their color and light of a Maxfield Parrish painting; so much so that if an artist had represented them exactly, you would say that the painting looked unreal.

Golden sunrises are greeted by birds singing new songs declaring a new and special spring. Beneath the trees, in the meadows, and along the creeks, wildflowers of every kind abound as if every seed, patiently waiting these past few years, has decided it is the time to finally "go for it." Colors, textures, smells, and sounds blend together forming a creation beyond compare. If you miss this spring in the mountains, you will miss a very special spring.



"There Wasn't Any Fences" An Interview with Phil Stadtler

by Teddy Goodrich

I am indebted to two people for this wonderful interview, Jerry Wilkinson and Phil Stadtler. Jerry was insistent that I meet Phil, not only because he knows much of the history of the area near the park, but because he is also the last of a vanishing breed of old-time cattlemen. As this interview shows, Jerry was right.

"I was born in Oakland, but when I was a child we lived on Gerber's old homestead in the San Antone Valley which they claimed when they came from Switzerland. There was an old log cabin—it was the original homestead house. It's gone now, but it was right by Gerber's main ranch. My dad went in partners with Mr. Gerber in about 1914.

"And I guess we were there nine or ten years, and then we took a homestead up at the head of the San Antone Valley which would be overlooking Skunk Hollow. You could see out to the Coe Ranch and the old Morrow Ranch. There was people there by the name of Morrow . . . Hall's Valley was the Morrow Ranch. And from our place we overlooked all that all the way to Pine Ridge. We moved out here to the San Joaquin Valley in 1928.

"The Hyde Ranch was 70,000 acres of deeded land at one time. The Quinto, the Romero, and the Simon Newman, a lot of that was part of the Hyde Ranch in the early days. There wasn't any fences. My dad rode up there for eight years steady, and they ran cattle from Tracy to Gilroy Hot Springs.

"Gerbers went up there in the late 1800s from Switzerland and went to the San Antone Valley. They had a dairy and was making cheese and hauling the cheese to San Jose with a buggy over the Mt. Hamilton Road.

"One time they went for Christmas, and they had all the Christmas presents in the buggy. Coming across the Isabel Creek the water was up, and it washed all the Christmas presents down the creek.

"I went to school in the San Antone School. There was eight kids in school, one in each grade. One teacher. They wouldn't hire a teacher there unless they had two children or more. We had Mrs. Elmgram and Mrs. Alward. Forrest, Keith, and Everett were Mrs. Alward's three boys, and Keith grew up and went to work for Mike Mahoney and he got killed on a horse out there.

My grandmother was a doctor up there. She had a doctor book. She would get the symptoms of someone who was sick up there, and then she'd doctor them according to what it said was wrong. She lived there as long as we did. She never went into town for eight years, and neither did Mrs. Gerber. My grandmother's name was Goess—Inez (Small) Goess.

"There was several people died of consumption up there, but I think that's why they came there. In the early days they used to come here for tuberculosis. There was a fella by the name of Day—Old Man Day. He died of T.B. and my grandmother had doctored him. He slept on some planks; he just had straw and planks and an old rug for a blanket. He lived at the head of the 'jump off,' the creek which is just a little bit south of the old San Antone School.

"Then there was Matt and Otto Keller. When they decided to move some place, they'd go build a new set of round corrals and build a little shack and move there. They moved to six or seven different places in the time that I can remember.

"Walter Crow was the name of another fellow that lived up there and worked here and there. A fellow by the name of Charlie Schultz was the mail carrier. We got our mail two times per week from Livermore.

"Joaquin Murrietta brought the mesquite trees that grow on Wilkinson's Ranch now. Arizona, that's where they came from. Murrietta built the little 'dobe house at the [Wilkinson's] headquarters. There was a can dug in the brick that he had hid money in. But someone here in the later years found that can and dug it out. You can still see the place in the walls. They ripped those lodgepoles [that line the inside of the adobe]; they knew exactly where to go.

"Murrietta and his men used to gather horses. They gathered in Crow Creek, and the Gill, Snodgrass, and Hyde Ranch. When they got 800 to 1,000 head of horses, they'd drive them to Sonora, Mexico. They stole horses up and down the San Joaquin Valley.

"John Walker from the family for whom Walker Basin, Walker Pass, and Walker Meadows are named came here in the early days and brought the first horses to Mt. Diablo. They swam across the Carquinez Straits with the horses to take them to Mt. Diablo. They ran horses there for years. Johnny Walker said they used to come out here to the San Joaquin Valley and catch wild horses.

"Yrenero Corona came up from Mexico in 1836. He married one of the Ortegas. (John Gilroy also married an Ortega.) He took up property on Orestimba Creek above the Narrows where Frank Freitas's ranch is now. He built an adobe house there—it's gone now. He sold horses to Murrietta. Yes, Murrietta bought horses, too; all the big ranchers sold horses to Murrietta.

"There used to be bear and antelope and elk in the Coast Range mountains.

"Gills built the road from the Garzas up to the Snodgrass Headquarters which is now called the Gill Headquarters. Snodgrass sold the ranch to Gill for $7 an acre and guaranteed 600 grown cattle. They found more like 1,400 cattle!

"Twitchell's homestead was on Robinson Creek. He built a little road in there with a wheelbarrow up to that spring that comes out of Red Creek and then over one little ridge into Robinson. He had a few cattle, and he'd go up there with a donkey or a horse and a little cart. He did everything by hand up there. He lived there.

"John Snodgrass built the first stock pond with horses which would be over in Paradise. He built that with a team. Gill developed the other dams.

"Hatch Springs was named after a fella by the name of Hatch. That was a homestead. Up above Hatch Springs is Red Creek Springs with the little cement box. My dad built that; that was our homestead.

"I built the pole corral on the Orestimba, twenty years ago, I guess.

"The mine on the Rooster Comb? I don't know who did it. I don't think there's hardly anyone alive who would know. C.T. Murphy, son-in-law of Ernest Gill, gave the Rooster Comb its name.

"The oldest mine and one of the most profitable was in Del Puerto Canyon. This was a quicksilver mine. There was Al Jones that lived there, and that was as far as the road used to come from Patterson. They built a railroad from Patterson out there to haul out the ore. Al Jones lived there, and he used to stay on the porch. We'd ride up a-horseback when I was a small boy, and he had lizards and horny toads tied up with a thread around the porch. He'd swat flies and feed 'em to them. They also caught flies on their own. He had them tied up with silk thread.

"One of the hillbillies who lived up there was Frost. Jack Frost his name was. He lived way over on the Livermore

side of San Antone Valley, and he made beer. The federals came up one time, and he just opened the door and said 'Come on in—I got anything you want,' and they took him to jail.

"Mike Early had a homestead up there, and he had a little store by the side of the road. He sold sody-water and beer and stuff. It was bootleg. He went to town and bought dynamite and caps and had them in the buggy coming back. He got out to open the gate, and the horse ran away. It didn't kill the horse, but it blew the buggy all apart!"

Snake Bite!
by Barry Breckling

There has only been one rattlesnake bite for as long as Coe has been a park, that is, until June 2nd of last year when a man was bitten at China Hole. I had always heard that the first snake bite was a boy scout leader showing his scouts how to handle rattlesnakes, and one day I found the accident report for that incident and that's exactly what it said occurred. We used to tell people that story, to allay their fear of rattlesnakes, and finish with, "If you don't bother the snakes, they won't bother you." We still can. In the latest incident, the gentleman was sunbathing at China Hole with his friend. He noticed that a rattlesnake had come up near his friend's leg so he picked it up, looked at it for a while, and when he put it down it quickly turned and bite him on the index finger. He mentioned the bite to a passing backpacker, but as the backpacker said, the victim didn't seem too concerned nor in a hurry to get help even though his hand was quite swollen. The backpacker was given the message that he would be walking up the China Hole Trail after a while and would appreciate a ride out if the ranger had time. After getting the report, Dean and I headed out into the backcountry, and I came upon him near the Blue Oak Horse Camp. He still had little concern. Although his hand was very swollen and he had local pain, apparently little poison was injected, as he had no other problems despite the bite having occurred more than four hours earlier, the long, hard walk up from China Hole, and the fact that he had mistakenly thought it was best to keep his hand above the level of his heart. When he heard that rattlesnake venom contains toxins that help pre-digest the prey (or human body parts), he decided that it would be best to go to the hospital.

The Canceled Hike That Wasn't
by Park Chamberlain

Since September I had planned to hike the Blue Ridge Loop with a half dozen others, all but one from Tandem Computers, where I work. The hike was planned to start early November 17th. Unfortunately the second major storm of the fall came through the Bay Area the evening before. After watching the weather reports early in the morning, I called the people that I know were coming and canceled the hike. I didn't know that Geoff Baldwin was coming, so I didn't call him. I didn't find out he had gone until the next day at work, when I received the following electronic mail message from him.

FROM: BALDWIN_GEOFF @PRUNE
TO: CHAMBERLAIN_PARK @COMM2
SENT: 91-11-18 09:33
SUBJECT: Hike got scrubbed?

Well, not entirely. I was unable to come to the Friday meeting because of a last minute meeting at the same time, so not knowing any better (on several levels), I showed up at the trailhead Sunday with my neighbor, Bert Allen (longtime PRA member). We figured that if this was what it took to get rain, we were willing to make the sacrifice. We hung around until 8:10 but then figured you all must have wimped out, so we set out into the mist and drizzle. It was moderately awful until we started down the Blue Ridge Trail. The crosswind was in the low thirties and the temperature in the low forties, with occasional heavy rain. It felt like oats blasting in my face. We were just a few brisk steps ahead of hypothermia until we got to the Jackass Trail cutoff and out of the wind. Fortunately Bert is quite familiar with the trails and was able to describe vividly the beautiful views I was missing. The wildlife was mostly home watching T.V. We saw five newts and one very furry pronghorn buck. We heard a couple of jays and saw a bunch of quail, but that was about it. No banana slugs. The ecology is like the Sierra foothills and not at all like the Coastal range around here. Lots of Ponderosa and blue and black oak. The final stretch was on the new Forest Trail, which is quite beautiful. It has the world's biggest Madrone, which is inhabited by psychedelic elves. Five and a half hours later we arrived back at Headquarters, wet and exhausted. It was miserable. Hope you liked the rain. And no, I'm not on for next week!

Lunch at Kelly Lake
by Libby Vincent

Feeling faintly guilty, Irwin and I clambered over the gate at the Gilroy Hot Springs entrance and headed up the road. We had tried once before to get to Kelly Lake on a day hike and hadn't made it. Coming in this way, it seemed like a sure thing.

It was about 10:00 on a clear and sunny Sunday morning, but it was still chilly down by Coyote Creek. We walked about a mile, then turned up the hill to Woodchopper Spring. Dave Sellers and Fred King had told me about an unmarked trail leading up the hill from Woodchopper, and this was the day to check it out. There is a trail, it is beautiful, and there is indeed a hill.

The trail climbed steeply but leveled out in enough places to enable us to catch a breath and drink greedily from our water bottles. Early wildflowers were emerging, a doe leaped off uphill, and a redtail wheeled high above us. We peeled off layers as we ascended and paused to take in the beautiful views that were slowly revealed: Palassou Ridge to the west, rearing high and dark, with the old buildings of Gilroy Hot Springs clustered on the flank, Pine Ridge to the northwest, clear and sharp in the morning sun, Pacheco Peak to the south (wouldn't it be nice to have the park stretch *that* far one day), and, to the east, a rolling fog bank in the valley. Drivers on I-5 must have been feeling their way carefully that morning.

The high point of the ridge was about 2,400 ft., quite a climb from around 1,100 ft. where we started. And now we were back in terra cognita again on the Jackson Trail—although there are several trails and tracks in the area, and we had to consult the topo and park maps and still trust our general sense of direction. We skirted the hill on a four-wheel-drive track, startling a couple of range cattle as we came around the corner. Two cows with half-grown calves took off at the sight of us, disappearing along a saddle and downhill toward the Redfern property with unexpected speed. We followed at a much more pedestrian pace and headed down a very steep ridge toward, we hoped, Kelly Lake. As we rounded a corner, a very large bird flapped away lazily. Good grief, what on earth is that? we wondered—but only for a split second, because it was obviously a great blue heron, and there just below us was Kelly Lake.

As we came down the last slope onto the western side of the dam, did we see a wisp of dust hanging in the air above the road that disappeared uphill toward Willow Ridge Crest? The following Saturday, as we graduated with this year's class of volunteers, Lee Sims told us that he had been on patrol that day and had stopped at Kelly Lake for lunch. We must have missed him by a hair's breadth. Lee had enthralled us at one of our early classes last fall doing *the* best canine impression ever when we novices were learning the ropes from all you old-timers.

Lunch began in a leisurely fashion with soup brewed to perfection on the portable stove, but the wind blowing off the lake began to get cool. The place was deserted, not a backpacker or mountain bike in sight, and it looked as though there never had been anyone there—unspoiled, remote, and beautiful. The temptation to circumambulate the lake was enormous, but we decided to postpone that delight for another day.

We headed up out of Kelly on the Coit Route. After the hill we had scrambled up that morning, the road was a piece of cake, hardly elevating our pulse rates. We walked a couple of miles along Mahoney Meadows and then got tempted again by terra incognita. Right about where a green water tank nestles to the west of the road, we cut across country for a couple of hundred yards and picked up another unmarked trail that took us gently down, down, downhill for a mile or two through fields of moss covered outcrops, gnarled oaks, and by a meandering stream. All too soon, Grapevine Spring took shape ahead of us, and we dropped back down to the road.

Feeling faintly apprehensive once again, we glanced over our shoulders half expecting Barry Breckling in the green machine to roll around the corner and tell us as nicely as anyone ever could *not* to climb over that gate again, please. But he didn't, so we didn't have to tell him that we wouldn't.

The sun had set for us by now, down in that ravine, although some higher hilltops to the east were still catching the last rays before the sun slipped below Palassou. Out came the hats and gloves again as the temperature dropped. We finally passed the first people we had seen in the park that day—half a dozen or so of the curious and not very energetic who had also hopped over the gate and were wandering up the road a bit to see just what might be there. Little do they know!

We hauled ourselves over the gate again much more slowly than we had that morning. As we sank into the soft comfort of well-sprung car seats and headed home, we reflected happily on a glorious day of exertion and exploration, vistas near and far, adventure and reward. I hope our next trip to Kelly Lake is as much fun—I can't imagine it being anything else. There's something new and different each and every time we come to Coe Park.

Mother's Day Breakfast

Don't forget to put Sunday, May 10, on your calendars! The eighth annual Mother's Day Breakfast, organized by Lee Sims, will be held at Manzanita Point. Lee, together with his committee, plan to serve a delicious breakfast of freshly picked strawberries, orange juice, sausage and eggs, home-fried potatoes, biscuits, and coffee/tea/hot chocolate. Back again by popular demand, live music will be provided by *Cat and the Fiddle*.

This is an event you won't want to miss! Each of the previous breakfasts sold out soon after the tickets went on sale. Only a limited number of tickets will be sold. Costs to attend are $7.50 for adults and $4.50 for children (six years of age or younger) and senior citizens. If you have questions about the breakfast, please call Lee Sims (home (209/383-7848) or work (209/722-7467)).

Come Help Clean Up Arnold Cabin!

by Lee Sims

Put the weekend of May 30 and 31 on your calendar to join an expedition to the east fork of the Coyote Creek to clean up Arnold Cabin. This parcel is soon to become state property, and it desperately needs a cleanup. It is important to bring good work gloves and to wear sturdy shoes. You can either hike out to Arnold Cabin on Friday night (about 6.5 miles from the headquarters) or wait until 8 a.m. Saturday morning, when transportation will be provided to the area. You will have opportunities to star gaze on Saturday night, interact with others who also love Coe Park, and be one of the first to see the new park acquisition.

The dinner on Saturday night will be specially catered (for a very reasonable fee); you should plan to bring food for breakfasts and lunches. To sign up and to receive all the information about what to bring and where to meet, please call either Roberta Wright (408/683-2219) or Lee Sims (209/383-7848 or 209/722-7467).

See you on May 30!

Thanks for the Support!

During the past year, more than 200 individuals, families, and organizations made a contribution to the Pine Ridge Association. We love Coe Park, and it is gratifying to know that others also wish to support the work of the Association on behalf of the park. We are grateful for each and every contribution, and we would like to recognize these individuals below. Thanks very much for your support in 1991!

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Is This Your Last *Ponderosa?*

by Margaret Enns

Check your address label. If you have a 1991 above your name, it is time to renew your membership in the Pine Ridge Association. When you renew, you will continue to receive the association's newsletter, *The Ponderosa,* and your 10% discount at the visitor center. We have exciting events planned for this year, including Trail Day in April, Mother's Day Breakfast in May, the BBQ in September, and guided walks, hikes, and evening programs throughout the spring. The newsletter will keep you informed of the upcoming activities in the park. Most important, your membership helps support the Pine Ridge Association and its dedication to enriching the experience of the public when they visit Coe Park. We strive to teach understanding and respect for the park, so that it can be enjoyed for generations to come. As a member, your commitment is vital to the success of all of our endeavors and provides the essential base for our future efforts. Please take a moment to renew today. The insert provides information about the different levels of membership and their benefits and privileges.

Thanks for your support.

Late Deliveries?

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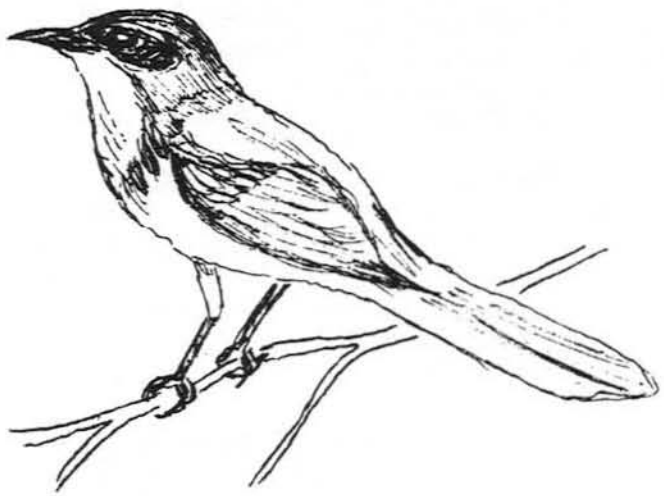

PINE RIDGE ASSOCIATION
Benefits and Privileges

Single Membership

Level	Benefits and Privileges
Basic Membership: $10-$49	● Membership in the Pine Ridge Association (one vote) ● Subscription to *The Ponderosa* ● 10% discount on purchases at the Visitor Center ● Advance notice of special events and ticket availability
Sponsor: $50-$99	All of the above plus— ● Priority sales of tickets for special events ● Choice of one gift item (e.g., Coe T-shirt OR autographed copy of newly revised trails guide written by Winslow Briggs) ● Invitation to attend one of the training sessions normally reserved for volunteers (e.g., on wildflowers, birds, tracking)
Benefactor: $100-$299	All of the above plus— ● One free ticket to all special events (e.g., Mother's Day Breakfast, Fall Barbecue) ● Invitation to join a special interpretative activity in the back country (e.g., day-long hike with optional camping the night before or after)
Patron: $300 and above	All of the above for one year plus basic membership indefinitely

Family Membership

Level	Benefits and Privileges
Basic Membership: $20-$99	● Membership in the Pine Ridge Association (two votes) ● Subscription to *The Ponderosa* ● 10% discount on purchases at the Visitor Center ● Advance notice of special events and ticket availability
Sponsor: $100-$199	All of the above plus— ● Priority sales of tickets for special events ● Choice of two gift items (e.g., Coe T-shirt OR autographed copy of newly revised trails guide written by Winslow Briggs) ● Invitation for family members to attend one of the training sessions normally reserved for volunteers (e.g., on wildflowers, birds, tracking) (minimum age 12)
Benefactor: $200-$599	All of the above plus— ● Two free tickets to all special events (e.g., Mother's Day Breakfast, Fall Barbecue) ● Invitation for family members to join a special interpretative activity in the back country (e.g., day-long hike with optional camping the night before or after) (minimum age 12)
Patron: $600 and above	All of the above for one year plus basic family membership indefinitely

Pine Ridge Association
Henry Coe State Park
P. O. Box 846
Morgan Hill, CA 95038
(408) 779-2728

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Assistant Editor:	Barry Breckling	
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This Issue's Reporters:	Geoff Baldwin Park Chamberlain Margaret Enns	Teddy Goodrich Lee Sims Libby Vincent
This Issue's Illustrator:	Ross Hemeon	

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