The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

October 1993

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

How to Get Stew from a Tree

Dad said, "Go get dinner." Bobby knew what that meant. He ran into their little white house perched high on a side ridge just below the crest. The house, which was surrounded by a tall white picket fence, was more of a cabin, but it was nicer than any of the other homesteader's cabins in the hills. Bobby grabbed his .22, which leaned against the wall just inside the front door (not that there were any other doors to the house). As he huffed and puffed up to the top of the ridge, he saw a shadow pass in front of him. He looked up, and although blinded by the sun, he could easily pick out the shape of a red-tailed hawk. As the shadow passed to his left he heard the familiar shrill call of a ground squirrel and saw it quickly dive for its hole. He had noticed when ground squirrels saw bobcats or coyotes that they would sit up, face the predator, and give out a loud chirp every few seconds. He wouldn't wait for the squirrel to reappear. His dad said that ground squirrels were no good to eat; although once while out hunting with his neighbor, Bobby had shot a ground squirrel, and they had built a fire and baked it up right there. It tasted pretty good to the two boys.

Last week, when his dad told him to get dinner, he had taken his father's .410 shotgun and brought back four nice band-tailed pigeons, one for each member of the family. Bobby ended up getting seconds as his sister only ate a little of hers. Close to where he had shot the pigeons he had seen a big gray squirrel, and that is where he was heading today. He loved squirrel stew, especially the way his mother made it. He crested the ridge and headed down the other side through the pines and black oaks. A brush rabbit ran off into some low bushes. He made a mental note. As he approached the Little Fork of the Coyote Creek, he heard the chirping of a gray squirrel. When he reached the flat just above the creek he could no longer hear the squirrel. He picked up two rocks and hit them together making a sound similar to the squirrel's chirp. The squirrel answered. Bobby could see its big fluffy tail flitting anxiously. He carefully took aim, squeezed the trigger, and shot the squirrel.

In less than a half hour he had a second squirrel and was heading back home. As he started up the ridge, he stopped in the sparse shade of a large digger pine. There beneath it were a bunch of freshly fallen cones with pine nuts strewn everywhere. He spent just enough time to fill one of his pockets. The only thing better than his mom's squirrel stew was her squirrel stew sprinkled with pine nuts. He heard another squirrel a short ways off, but he would not look for it, as two would be plenty for their stew. Dad always said that the Good Lord put the plants and animals here on the earth for them to eat, but they were expected to be stewards of the land. It was their responsibility to take only what they needed. In fact, his father said that there was beginning to be so many people in the country that soon people would just be eating cows, pigs, and chickens, and hardly anyone would be eating the wild game any more. He also said that the government would have to set aside more parks like that Yosemite Park in the high mountains just so people would be able to enjoy nature. Bobby figured this would be a long way off. He could enjoy

nature all the way home, and then after he cracked a bunch of pine nuts, there would be that great squirrel stew.

The native squirrels at Coe are the California ground squirrel and the western gray squirrel. Sometime in the 1940s or '50s, eastern fox squirrels were released in parks such as San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. They have slowly spread into other areas. They had moved into the East Bay by the mid-1960s and were first seen at Coe in the early 1980s. They are now well established. Ground squirrels continue to be common, but the gray squirrel has disappeared out of the ideal habitat found in the western part of the park. The last ones seen on the west side were in the mid-1970s, and there is no explanation for their disappearance. Occasionally gray squirrels are still seen in the Orestimba and Pacheco drainage, but these areas contain marginal habitat and have low populations.

Both the gray and the fox squirrel are tree squirrels. Although they may spend much time on the ground (especially the gray squirrel), if they are frightened they will head for a tree. Ground squirrels will climb fence posts, small trees, and occasionally even fairly high on larger trees, but they will always head for the ground when frightened. The tree squirrels move easily across the forest canopy where tree tops meet, or occasionally they will leap across from tree to tree where the branches don't quite touch. Both are big acorn eaters and also like pine nuts. They will leave the telltale core of pine cones where they have chewed away the scales to get to the pine nuts.

When the tree squirrels leave tracks on the ground, as with other tree dwelling rodents, their front feet are put down across from each other. Ground squirrels, like other ground dwelling rodents, put their front feet down diagonally from each other—one slightly in front of the other. Western gray squirrels along with scrub jays are important up-hill planters of acorns (gravity along with the round shape of acorns takes care of the down-hill planting). They bury acorns and later return to eat them, but they never remember where they have buried them all. The eastern fox squirrel is pale gray but with lots of rusty red on its face, legs, underside, and tail. The western gray squirrel is large and has a very large, fluffy tail. It is all gray but with a lighter underside. Although people would not be allowed to use gray squirrels from the park for stew anymore, it would be nice to see them again on the western side.

Digger Is Sometimes a Dirty Word

by Libby Vincent

I've always liked digger pines. They're beautiful trees, a lovely, soft shade of gray-green and an elegant, asymmetrical shape. Some fine specimens near the visitor center at Coe Park cast almost adequate shade, but the farther east in the park you travel, the sparser and more ragged they look. And in between, along most trails in the park, young waif digger pines grow right beside the trail, looking thin and weedy, as vulnerable as lost and hungry refugee children standing on a street corner hoping for a good meal.

I like digger pines, too, because the name has a very familiar resonance. In Australia where I grew up, a digger is a soldier who fought in one of Australia's overseas military entanglements. Diggers struggled up the ghastly hills of Gallipoli to be slaughtered by Turkish soldiers firing down from the heights. Diggers fought tenaciously in the heat and dust of North Africa, slogging across sand dunes to expel Rommel from Tobruk and then be expelled in turn. Diggers also died alongside American soldiers in the chaos of Vietnam. In Australia's male-dominated, macho culture, diggers are objects of reverence and awe. People in pubs buy them pints.

Digger pines have much of the tenacity of Australian native plants, which have adapted in fascinating ways to a very marginal environment of poor soil and enormous heat and drought. Digger pines grow in odd shapes and unlikely directions like the eucalyptus, casuarina, and wattle. Digger pines, like these trees, cast only a scraggly shade; park your car under one on a hot day and the reward will be meager. And you'd better hope that a cone doesn't descend from the heights to crack your windscreen or scar the paint. The cones of the digger pine are the largest and heaviest of any American pine except the Coulter, so beware.

But now the name "digger" is frowned on, and I wanted to find out why.

Last April, the visitor center almost collapsed under the weight of many copies of *The Jepson Manual* waiting to be picked up. But heavy though it is, Jepson is full of good information; it's the authoritative reference tool if you want to find out anything about California flora. Looking in Jepson's index for digger pines, they weren't there. I tracked them down under *Pinus sabiniana* and found the following stern pronouncement: "The common name digger pine is pejorative in origin, so best avoided." Jepson calls *Pinus sabiniana* the gray or foothill pine.

Suspecting, but wanting to know why digger is a pejorative term, I turned to Elna Bakker and *An Island Called California*. Ms Bakker gave, as usual, rich detail: "[The digger pine] shares a derogatory and undeserved name with a group of California Indians who did much more than dig. They wove some of the world's most beautiful basketry, a type of craftsmanship that has never been surpassed." She continues to call the tree digger pine, however. And there was even more detail in a recent copy of the *California Monthly* from the University of California Alumni Association. In a recent article about Willis Jepson and the new edition of the *Manual*, I found the following: "'Digger' was a pejorative term for an Indian who dug for food with a stick . . . . The name was attached to *Pinus sabiniana* because [Native Americans] climbed the tree to harvest its nuts. Digger had a negative connotation of someone groveling in the dirt for an unsavory meal."

Well, O.K., gray is more politically correct than digger. But now that I'm distracted from the tree itself and drawn into what it's called, I wonder why "sabiniana"? So I opened Coe Park's Volunteer Handbook to the chapter on plants and, in the section on conifers, found what I was looking for. "David Douglas, the Scottish botanist who gave the ponderosa its common and species name, collected samples of the gray pine at Mission San Juan Bautista in 1831. He suggested the species name of the gray pine in honor of his friend Joseph Sabin, who was the secretary of the Horticultural Society in London at the time." Hmm, sounds like a lot of good old boy colonialists to me. I'm more interested in the living tree.

I learned that gray pines are native to, and are only found in, California. Gray pines are one of the trees in a plant community called foothill woodlands where rainfall ranges from 15 to 40 inches, summers are long, hot, and dry, and the deciduous blue oak (very common in Coe Park) and sometimes the valley oak (if you find one in Coe Park you will be suitably rewarded) are common companions. Bakker describes the extent of foothill woodland as forming a "'bathtub ring' around the Great Valley with minor incursions into the outer Coast Ranges and low passes east and south of the southern Sierran slope." She describes the range of the gray pine as "for the most part confined to the foothills and ranges surrounding the Great Valley. . . . They filter west, however, to sea-facing bluffs in southern Monterey County and confront the desert interior in Kern County and on the Modoc Plateau. Truly a Californian, [the gray pine] does not grow in Oregon and is rare south of the Tehachapis."

Gray pines generally grow between 500 and 4,000 feet, but they are at their best between 2,000 and 3,000 feet. They grow to 50 or 75 feet high and have three needles per bundle. Those enormous cones mature by September of the second season, and they remain firmly attached to the branches for a number of years. To get at the delicious pine nuts, Indians used to hasten the opening of the cones by placing them in a small fire. Gray pines don't grow tall and straight like ponderosa pines (or many other pine trees). Younger trees have a rounded crown of several upright branches from a short, thick stem. In middle-aged trees, the upper branches grow very large and long, forming conspicuous U-shaped forks. The bark of older trees is thick and roughly furrowed and ridged, of a dark gray-brown, tinged with purple-red in unweathered parts.

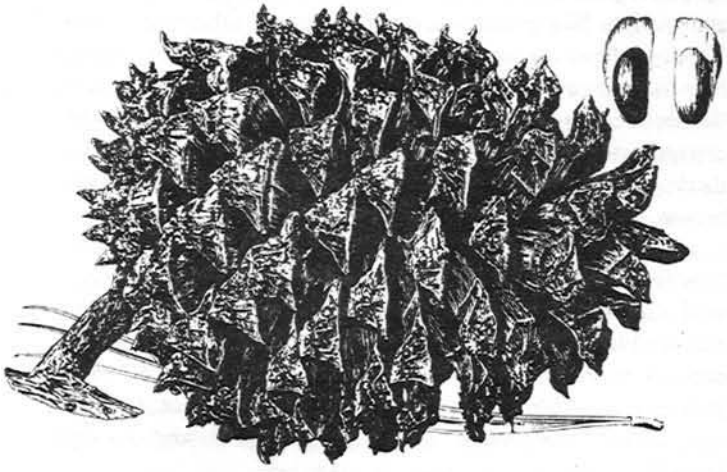
"Little is definitely known of the longevity of this pine," said George Sudworth in his ancient (1908) but highly respectable *Forest Trees of the Pacific Slope*, but "[it] appears to attain its average full growth in from 60 to 80 years. . . . If permitted, it would probably not attain an age of over 150 years except in a broken and decrepit form."

In Coe Park, gray pines are easy to identify because their only close relative, the ponderosa pine, looks nothing much like them. Ponderosas only grow on the higher ridges on the western side of the park, and they grow tall and straight with rich clusters of shorter, dark-green needles standing out in broom-like tufts. (Think of Sada's pine, the emblem of the Pine Ridge Association, adorning one of the last saddles of Pine Ridge before it ends at Manzanita Point.) You don't have to struggle to identify gray pines as you do oak trees in the park: Let's see now, its leaves have deep lobes like Norwegian fjords therefore it's a black oak, or: Its leaves are concave, boat-shaped, so is it a coast live oak? There's no mistaking that smoky, gray-green spindly looking tree with clusters of dark cones and swooping trunks and branches.

The next time you're at the park, pause to enjoy the sight of the lush specimen looming over the picnic table in the parking area behind Ranger Breckling's house, or the thick-headed chaps on the slope right below the visitor center. You *know* there's good rainfall here! Then when you're next slogging up the East Fork of the Coyote, glance up at Eagle Pines clustered in a needy bunch on Willow Ridge. And when you're cruising, pedaling, trotting, or tramping along the Kaiser-Aetna road toward the Rooster Comb, look around at hillsides covered with an array of sizes and shapes of gray pines, thinner and much more sparsely foliaged in the dry, east side of the park.

This California native is an exquisite adaptation to an intimidating environment. All it needs are dry, shallow, coarse, gravely soils that are baked and cracking throughout a rainless summer. Give it a hot, dry chaparral-covered

hillside or a couple of blue oaks to keep it company, and it might thrive for eighty, a hundred years, or more. May we all be so lucky.



Four Rivers District Update

by Kay S. Robinson

So many projects and events are taking place in Henry Coe State Park that the fall season is nearly as busy as spring.

Good news on the signing of the architectural contract for the visitor center expansion project! The firm of Robert D. Ferris of San Diego has started work on the plans; Paul Johnson, the project architect, has suggested some innovative and exciting ideas for us to consider. With PRA funds, a topographical survey was completed so that structural details, such as access routes (in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act) can be engineered. In conjunction with the designing of the downstairs addition, an Interpretive Displays Group has been established. The goal of this group is to generate ideas and work with a professional display consultant to provide the foundation for the displays and other exhibits that will be featured in the newly expanded area. The group consists of six PRA volunteers, Barry Breckling, and myself. We have met twice to start the brainstorming process, and the consultant is on board, too.

Due to requests from park visitors, we are also working on a plan that would enable the Coyote Creek entrance to Coe Park to be opened to the public. Lots of decisions need to be made first, including how to staff the Coyote Creek entrance during spring weekends using a combination of park staff, volunteers, and camp hosts; how to maintain security; how to handle money; and how to set up campsite registration, communications, parking, utilities, sanitary facilities, and housekeeping. Plans to address each of these issues are currently being developed. Initially, we envision that this entrance will open, at least for a limited trial basis, next spring.

Another event that we will undertake in response to requests from park visitors is a back-country wilderness weekend. A multi-group effort will present another Wilderness Weekend next spring. It will be similar to this year's Orestimba Dedication, but smaller in scale. Mark these dates on your calendars: Saturday and Sunday, April 23 and 24, 1994. The format will be similar in that cars will be allowed to drive into the Orestimba either for day use or for overnight use. Car camping, trail camping, hiking, mountain bicycling, and horseback riding are encouraged. A barbecue will again be available (a fund-raiser for the Trails Advisory Committee), and a trails/camping/"bookstore"/information table will be operating. The differences are that a day use or overnight fee will be charged. Some of the collected fees may be returned to PRA under the power of a memorandum of understanding for fee collection. And, of course, no dedication ceremony will be held. I am putting together a group of people who will help me coordinate this event. All PRA members are welcome to join the committee; they do not need to be Coe Park volunteers. Doug Reynaud is anxious to coordinate another wonderful barbecue. Call me at 408/623-2431 if you are interested in serving on this committee. Our first meeting will probably be near the end of this year.

A grant proposal is being submitted through the Department of Parks and Recreation for funds from the National Recreational Trails Act. The Trails Advisory Committee has been hard at work to meet the October 1 deadline; funds are requested for work on seven miles of trails in the Woodchopper/Grapevine Springs area of the park. The CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act report) has been completed and is open for a three-week period of public review.

Many other projects and events are keeping all of the state and park staff and most of the volunteers busy, such as California Clean-up Day on October 2, the Fall Barbecue on October 9, PRA volunteer training throughout the fall months, and springs development and maintenance assisted by the Mule Deer Foundation in November. The raffle at the Fall Barbecue brought in over $700 which will go directly to the project of expanding the visitor center.

As you can see, we're all busy and, of course, business at Headquarters is picking up with fall coming on. Come on up and enjoy the cooler weather and fall colors.

Time to Run for the Board

The Pine Ridge Association will hold its annual election for Board of Directors in December. The terms of two directors expire at the end of this year. Now is the time to prepare your candidate's statement and send it to the Board's Recording Secretary, Kevin Gilmartin, 127 Glenwood Avenue, Woodside, CA 94062.

Any association member may run for the Board. A member may also nominate another PRA member. To do this, send Kevin a short statement explaining why you believe the person would be a good Board member, and he will contact your nominee to ask the person to consider running.

The most important qualification for a Board member is a willingness to attend Board meetings and to participate in carrying out tasks for the association. Meetings typically take place every other month on week nights. The term of office is three years. If a Board member is also a Coe Park volunteer, meetings and board-related activities count toward volunteer hours. If you would like to attend a Board meeting to see what they are like, the next one will be held on Thursday, November 4, at the Classic Square Office Building in Morgan Hill starting at 7:30 p.m.

So that the ballots can be prepared for distribution in the next issue of *The Ponderosa,* it is important that all candidate statements be received in a timely manner. Please send your statements to Kevin postmarked on or before **Monday, November 15, 1992.** (If you plan to nominate someone else, please do so at least two weeks earlier.) Your statement might be a few paragraphs long and might contain information like how long you have been a PRA member, why you became interested in Coe Park, ways that you have served the park or other volunteer activities in which you have benefited the public, any special qualifications or experience that you have, and specific plans that you have for improving the park as a Board member.

If you have any questions about what it would be like to be a Board member or if you would like additional guidance on putting together a candidate statement, please call Kevin at 415/851-7813.

The December Ballot: What to Expect

In December, all members of the Pine Ridge Association will have the opportunity to vote for two members of the PRA Board of Directors and to approve a new set of bylaws for the organization. Although the intent of the new bylaws is the same as our current ones, many changes in wording and some new sections are required by the state's manual for cooperating associations. The text of the bylaws and the statements of the candidates running for the board will be included along with the ballot. This year, balloting materials, plus a pre-addressed envelope, will be sent in a special mailing rather than be included in the December issue of *The Ponderosa.* The mailing should reach PRA members by the beginning of December. The ballots must be returned to the Four Rivers District office by the end of December to be counted. If you have any questions about this procedure, please call Barbara Bessey (415/851-7813).

Welcome New Members

by Lee Dittmann

As of the end of September 1993, the following people had joined the Pine Ridge Association. Thank you all for your support, and welcome to the PRA!

Julia Chisholm Adams, Gilroy
Richard Allsop, South San Francisco
Joseph Belli, Morgan Hill
John Briese, Morgan Hill
Peter Carlisle, Morgan Hill
Dave Carter, Sunnyvale
Bonnie Doran, Fremont
K. Tendzin Dorje, San Jose
Roberto Escobar, Morgan Hill
Tom Fink, San Jose
David Finkle, San Jose
James & Juliann Fitzharris, Santa Clara
Penelope Karas, Morgan Hill
Penny Kirk, Santa Cruz
Paul Lovejoy, Mayens-de-Riddes, Switzerland
Steve Marquez, Gilroy
Owen Melroy, Morgan Hill
Martin Michael, Los Gatos
Rosemary & Albert Mirko, Morgan Hill
Ronald Pray, Gilroy
John Reed, San Jose
Toni Sousa, Palo Alto
John Trone, San Jose
Deborah Vajretti, Morgan Hill

PINE RIDGE ASSOCIATION
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Morgan Hill, CA 95038-0846
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October 1993

Dear Friend of Coe Park,

I am pleased to announce that The Pine Ridge Association and Gallery Morgan Hill are co-sponsoring an art show that will feature works by Gallery Morgan Hill artists and selected guest artists; the theme of the show will be works of art related to the flora, fauna, and natural history features of Henry W. Coe State Park. Entitled *Coe Revisited: A Second Look,* the art works will be on display at Gallery Morgan Hill from Saturday, November 13, through Monday, January 3, 1994. A portion of each sale will directly benefit the Pine Ridge Association, which provides interpretive services for Henry Coe State Park.

We will open the show with a benefit reception. I sincerely hope that you will attend the reception opening the show, as well as honoring the artists, on *Saturday, November 13, from 3 pm to 7 pm* at the gallery. Hors d'oeuvres and beverages will be provided by members of the Pine Ridge Association and Gallery Morgan Hill. Guest artists, who will show their works the night of the reception only, include some well-known Bay area artists: Dave Sellers, Kathy Paivinen, and Dan Tracey.

Planning for this event began almost eight months ago. Early in the spring, artists representing the gallery got an opportunity to enter into the back country of Coe Park, where they began their inspirational process. The artists sketched, took pictures, or otherwise documented the Coe scenes they experienced; over the summer, they have turned these ideas into the works of art that they will share with us during the art show.

I am looking forward to seeing the results of the creative process. The gallery artists have indicated that, once again, they have made an effort to price their works so that they will be affordable to potential buyers.

I hope you will join me, members of the Pine Ridge Association, and the artists of Gallery Morgan Hill as we open *Coe Revisited: A Second Look* on Saturday, November 13. The Gallery is located at 17490 South Monterey Road in Morgan Hill. The Gallery is open from 10 am to 6 pm Tuesday through Saturday, and from noon to 4 pm on Sunday. Call the gallery for extended holiday hours.

Thanks for your support. See you there!

Very sincerely yours,

Barbara Bessey

Barbara L. Bessey
Chair, Pine Ridge Association Board of Directors

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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. Articles and artwork relating to the history, natural history, and management of the park are welcome. Please send submissions to the editors care of Henry W. Coe State Park, P.O. Box 846, Morgan Hill, CA 95038; or call 415/851-7813.

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