The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

September 1994

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

The Pine Ridge Visitor Center

May our awareness of what Sada Coe Robinson did for this park never diminish. Let the knowledge of "sturdy pioneers," the memory of swaying blackberry vines against a ranch house window, and a vision of what a Coe Park visitor center should be, persist as long as Henry W. Coe State Park exists.

The idea of building a visitor center at Henry W. Coe State Park predated the park's existence. In 1953, Sada gave her 12,230-acre Pine Ridge Ranch to Santa Clara County. Shortly afterwards, she told county representatives that she would like the park to have a visitor center and that she would donate the money required to fund the building. County bureaucrats move slowly; nothing was accomplished during the five years the county held the property.

State bureaucrats move even slower. When the California State Park System took over ownership of the property in 1958, and actually before the property was fully transferred, Sada told state park officials that she thought the park should have a visitor center. She and the park officials spent about 13 years getting the paperwork done before construction was started in 1971.

Many interesting events occurred during planning and construction of Sada's Pine Ridge Visitor Center. I say "Sada's" because she was intimately involved with the whole process. To start off, Sada donated the money for the building of the visitor center. I hadn't realized until recently, while I was reading old state park correspondence, that she had originally wanted to be an anonymous donor. In a letter to Area Manager Bob Stewart, District Four Superintendent Milton Frincke said, "Remember Mrs. Robinson wants to remain anonymous. The museum is a donation from the Foundation through anonymous donors." So, Sada gave $80,000 to the California State Parks Foundation, unaware that as time passed, more and more people would learn about her generous gift.

I don't know the details, but I believe Sada was instrumental in gaining the services of a man named Oscar Meyer (no, not the hot dog guy) as the contractor. Apparently, Mr. Meyer did a good job. Bob Stewart wrote in a letter to Milton Frincke that ". . . the quality of the work was superior."

Inside this issue . . .

The history of our current visitor center

Plans for a major expansion of the visitor center

What is a pouncing pachyderm?!

Calendar of upcoming events

. . . and more!

Printed on recycled paper.

Originally it was thought that the building and displays would cost about $55,000. Before long the price tag was up to $75,000, and by the time the construction started it was up to $94,700 without displays. It was decided that about $11,000 would have to be pared off for construction to be feasible. The fireplace and chimney planned for the east end of the building were scrapped, along with the rock walkways around the building and the tile work in the rest rooms. Also, the state would provide the fixtures for the rest rooms.

The state park's interpretive services staff in Sacramento would be the group responsible for construction of displays for the visitor center. As donated money for the displays diminished, tempers flared.

Sacramento: Coe displays should cost about $12,000.

Field staff: We don't have $12,000. We spent everything on building construction.

Sacramento: Here we go again with another unfunded project.

Field staff: Well, we really need $10,000 for display work, but Sacramento will scream. We'll try for $6,000.

Sacramento: Our budget for the whole year for the whole state is $8,000 and you want what?

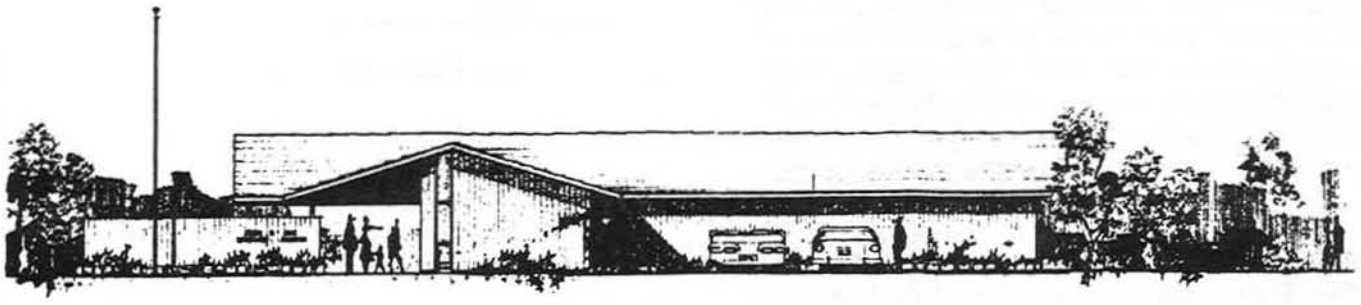
One positive note about the displays was Sada's donation of thousands of dollars worth of the Coe family antiques. Basically, Sada invited people from the state's interpretive services to go through her house and pick out what they wanted to use for the two "house rooms"—the dining room and the parlor.

Sada had firm ideas about what the visitor center should look like. When an architect from the state drew up plans showing a modern building, she objected. A private architectural firm, George Livermore and Associates from San Francisco, gave it a first try but didn't quite meet Sada's expectations. In a letter to the architect, District Superintendent Frincke said, ". . . I have discussed this project with Mr. Mott [then Park Director William Penn Mott, Jr.] and the changes that Mrs. Robinson wants to effect. He and I both agree that as far as the State is concerned . . . the exterior must conform to the old farm buildings which are in the area. It would be completely incongruous and obtrusive to allow the building as it is designed here to go into the location we have chosen." Livermore and Associates submitted revised plans, the plans were approved by all parties, and the design of our visitor center was established.

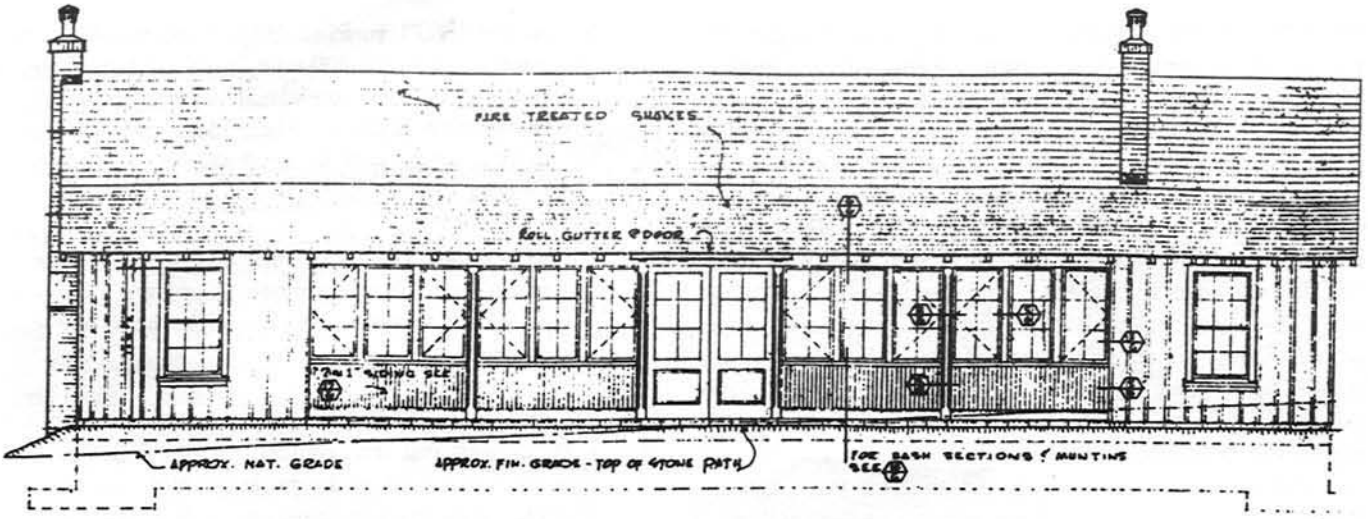
On April 27, 1971, eight months and a day from the time Sada and Superintendent Frincke picked the location for the visitor center, the ground was broken for the new building. Construction went quickly. The foundation was in by May 12th, dry wall was up by June 8th, and the building was wired by early August. The shake roof was done by June 17th, and painting was finished by August 6th. The building was completed and handed over to Area Manager Stewart on August 10th.

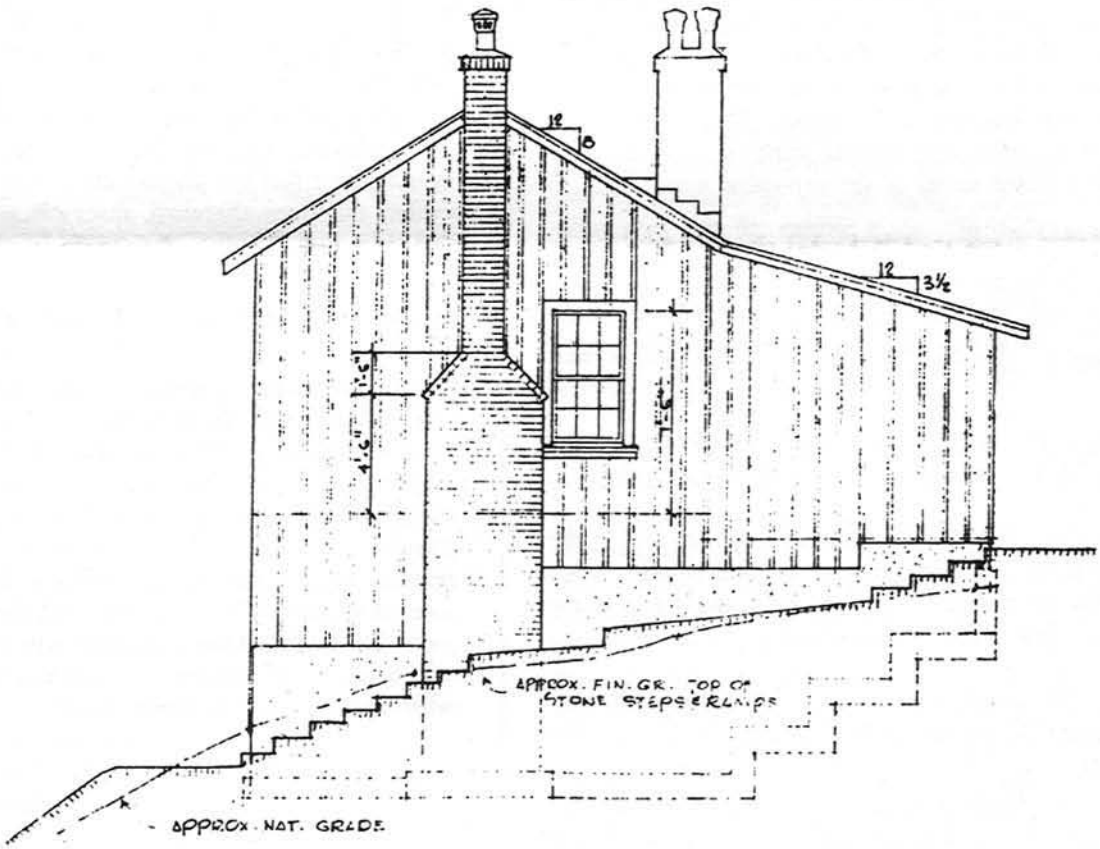
It took a number of months to complete the display work and get it into the place, and Sada's furniture was not moved into the building until March 1972. On May 17th, Park Director Mott, Superintendent Frincke, Area Manager Stewart, Park Supervisor Ed Strouse, Architect Livermore, and others honored Sada Coe Robinson with a lunch in the completed visitor center.

It was through Sada's generosity and persistence that we ended up with our splendid visitor center. If our visitor center expansion is to succeed, we need to approach it in the same spirit.



Design proposed by the state but turned down by Sada





Final plans as approved by Sada
Pretty close to the way the visitor center looks now

Visitor Center Vision

by Kay S. Robinson, Cooperating Associations Liaison

As I was walking a trail the other day, I was impressed by the beauty and solitude that is found at Coe. I could have been twenty miles from the nearest habitation. I heard no one, saw only birds and squirrels. I had walked twenty minutes from my truck and I might as well have been in the middle of a huge wilderness. And yet I was a five-minute drive from Coe headquarters on the Flat Frog Trail. Some of our visitors do extended day and overnight hikes or rides in the park; some only get as far as the Springs Trail; others see only the visitor center. As a place to learn about nature and specifically about the ecological wonder of Coe, our visitor center provides only the slightest peek into that world. In my mind's eye, I can see the vaulted ceiling of the new expanded visitor center, the winding staircase, the Native American room, and the audio-visual room where interest is piqued and questions are answered.

As stated in our Department's mission, we, both staff and volunteer, are here "to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California." PRA's involvement in assisting the state fulfill its mission is one example of emerging public-private partnerships. This visitor center expansion project is already several steps closer to the final product. Completed facets of the expansion are:

1. In late 1990 and early 1991, approximately $25,000 of state funds were expended to move the septic tank and propane tank and relocate the leach field and septic system in preparation for the expansion of the visitor center.

2. In early 1993, the state spent approximately $1,000 for conceptual drawings of the expanded visitor center.

3. In June 1993, the state let a contract for $24,000 to the firm of Robert Donald Ferris to prepare working blueprints for the project. Architect Paul Johnson is in the third and final phase of this contract.

4. In fall 1993, the Pine Ridge Association spent $600 for a topographical survey of the building site to assist the architect.

5. In fall 1993, the Pine Ridge Association contracted for approximately $6,700 with Pouncing Pachyderm Productions to prepare conceptual schematics of the interior interpretive exhibits. Their ideas and proposals for the exhibit areas will be reviewed over the next several months.

6. In summer 1994, the Pine Ridge Association commissioned artist Yarka Kennett to prepare a color rendition of what the visitor center might look like when it is completed.

To date, about $58,000 has been allocated to this project. I am pleased that the members of the Pine Ridge Association are committed to the project. Not only has the board pledged funds from existing assets, but individual members are also making donations. This year's raffle (with proceeds going to support the expansion project) seems to be going well; many envelopes were returned early with raffle stubs and funds.

The fortieth anniversary of Coe as a state park is coming up in 1998. Can we meet the goal of a grand opening of the new visitor center in 1998? Your commitment to an expanded visitor center will help us realize that dream. A short hike on Flat Frog Trail will then be enhanced by a visitor center that can prepare the visitor before the hike and explain questions afterward, thanks to your support.

Something New in the Visitor Center

The Association is pleased that Rosse Hemeon, PRA member and Coe Park Volunteer, has produced such a lovely drawing of what the new visitor center expansion might look like. He took the architectural renderings prepared to date and put some skin on them, thar, bones! Thanks to Kay S. Robinson, who arranged to have the original of his drawing placed in a lovely wood frame, along with two photos of what the current visitor center looks like now. Rosse's creation will be on display in the visitor center, so that everyone can see both the present and what we hope the future may look like!

Thanks, Rosse!

Robert Donald Ferris Architect, Inc.: Up Close and Personal

by Barbara Bessey

The architect firm of Robert Donald Ferris was selected a year ago to prepare architectural drawings of the visitor center expansion. Paul Johnson, Vice President, who was assigned as the manager for the Coe Park project, has over sixteen years of design experience. What particularly impressed me about the credentials of the firm is the fact that they have worked in museum/visitor center settings and in historic preservation projects. In fact, a number of Paul's projects have been with the San Diego Historical Society, helping them to remodel building interiors and exhibit spaces. If you have visited the Anza-Borrego State Park visitor center, you have observed the work of the firm. Don't be misled to think that our visitor center will look like the one in Anza-Borrego. Paul Johnson views each job with respect to its location and the goals for the project.

What impressed Paul with our project is the potential for great views out of the back of the building. He also was sensitive to the fact that the expansion should preserve the feeling of the ranch days, continuing to have a barn-like appearance. His firm's experience with both museums and historic preservation led him to think carefully about several features, one of them being the roof. He wanted to select something that would blend in with the barn-like building, but he felt that a wooden roof in a remote setting like Coe Park would be too much of a fire hazard. Thus, he proposed something that would still blend in with the building yet not be a fire hazard.

As Paul studied the site, he felt that leaving the expansion as a single story would be too confining. To take advantage of the views and to provide more of a feeling of open space, he proposed that the extension be opened to two stories. This gives us many more possibilities as far as exhibits are concerned, since the open second story enables us to plan tall exhibits (how about a tall tree?) or to suspend large birds (maybe an eagle?) from the ceiling. As Paul began to design the building, he argued very strongly for us to have someone with a background in exhibit planning who could help us think through how the exhibits will fit into the completed space. As he put it, how can you make a good-fitting glove without the hand that is to go in it?

The PRA is very fortunate to have Paul and his firm working on the Coe Park project. Their expertise in museum remodeling and their sensitivity to the fact that the building needs to accommodate the exhibits will make the completed project a great place for interpretation!

Pouncing Pachyderm Productions: Up Close and Personal

by Barbara Bessey

In fall 1993, the Pine Ridge Association contracted with Pouncing Pachyderm Productions to provide consulting services on the conceptual design and preparation of the exhibit designs. Jeffrey Northam started the company approximately four years ago. He is very active in his profession; he is currently the State Coordinator for the Northern California section of the National Association of Museum Exhibitions. One function of this association is to provide an information exchange to its members, connecting suppliers of exhibit materials with exhibit designers and answering questions about effectiveness of exhibits. Why the name? Jeff indicated that, as a graduate student, he was especially interested in ice-age mammals, particularly elephants. So, why not?! Depending upon the project, he draws upon his associates, Rick and Wendy Kitimata. For the Coe project, all of them are working together: Jeff combines his experience in science and exhibit construction with Rick's graphics background and Wendy's exhibit design background.

Jeff feels that one of the positive aspects of our project is the opportunity to work with the architect. Too often a project is completed without enough attention being paid to what goes into the exhibit space. In the Coe project, Jeff and his associates made a number of suggestions about ways in which the building plans could be changed to enhance the exhibit space or the effects that the exhibits would have on the visitors; they were then incorporated into the next version of the architect's drawings.

Jeff tries to design exhibits that maximize the enjoyment of people of all ages and backgrounds. Thus, he likes to appeal to the various senses, not just sight. Central to his design is the concept of immersion. Visitors will use all of their senses to explore the natural history and cultural history of the park. Although there will be visible textual material, there will also be some "surprises" hidden from view that use the other senses. Jeff also feels that it is important to have the exhibits flow from one to another and be interrelated, just as they are in nature.

Jeff and his associates are working closely with state staff and PRA members to plan the final layout and content of the exhibits. We will describe the creative process for the exhibit space, and its results, in more detail in future issues of the newsletter.

Shop and Share with Lucky Stores

Lucky Stores of Northern California has designed a program to help nonprofit charitable and service organizations, such as the Pine Ridge Association, raise needed funds. Called "Shop and Share," Lucky will provide a 3 percent cash return on the amount of purchases (excluding tax) made by the group's members and friends during a prearranged three-day period. Purchases can be made at any Northern California Lucky Store. An organization may participate up to three times (nine days) in a twelve-month period.

We have selected the following three periods (always a Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday) for shopping by members and friends of the Pine Ridge Association: October 3–5, 1994; February 13–15, 1995; and May 22–24, 1995.

How does the program work? Lucky Stores will provide us with identification certificates containing our group number, which we will make available to you free of charge. We will distribute the first set of certificates (good for the October shopping days) at the Fall Barbecue (on September 25) and at the visitor center. You may make as many copies of the certificates as you wish (as long as the copies are the same size as the original certificates), and you may give the certificates to friends or family members (it is not required that they be PRA members). Each time you check out during the designated three-day period, present one identification certificate to the checkout person, who will enter the amount of the purchase (excluding tax) on the certificate, sign it, and place it in the register for return to the Lucky Store Shop and Share Coordinator. You may shop as many times during the designated three-day period as you wish; however, you need a separate certificate each time you checkout. Lucky Stores requires that you have your certificates prior to arriving at the store; *no certificates are to be distributed at or near any Lucky Store.* Violation could result in cancellation of the program for our association.

We hope that you will participate in this opportunity to support the Pine Ridge Association. Funds raised will go towards the expansion of the visitor center and the new exhibit areas it will contain. If you have any questions about the program, please call Barbara Bessey (415/851-7813).

Thanks to Lucky Stores of Northern California, and thanks very much to Barbara Radd, PRA member and Coe Park Volunteer, for bringing this program to our attention.

Time to Run for the PRA 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, September 29, in Morgan Hill starting at 7:30 p.m. Please call PRA Chair Dennis Pinion (408/779-3916) to get a copy of the next meeting's agenda and to obtain instructions on how to reach the meeting location.

We use the special nonprofit bulk-rate mailing permit for sending out association-related materials. However, this means that some members may not receive their newsletters or materials for several weeks after they are mailed. So that the ballots can be distributed (and received by all members) in a timely fashion, it is important that all candidate statements be postmarked on or before **Friday, November 16, 1994.** Please send your statements to Kevin at the address above. (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.

PRA Membership Update

by Lee Dittmann

As of September 3rd, the following people had joined our organization, bringing the total number of memberships to 292. Thank you all for your support and welcome to the Pine Ridge Association!

Rosalie Bruning, Morgan Hill
Betty Chase, Lake Buena Vista, Florida
Susan & Dennis Dong, Hayward
Annemarie Donjacour, San Francisco
Carroll F. Frankfurt, Palo Alto
Pat Gallagher, Sunnyvale
Dan Greene, Sunnyvale
Susan Lynne Haselhofer, Gilroy
Jeff & Judy Hittman, San José
Mathew Kidd, Redwood City
Barbara Knapp, Mountain View
Caephren McKenna, Piedmont
Annette Moeller & Mary Graff, Santa Cruz
Marianne C. Moore, Felton
Rick Nevins, Morgan Hill
Kris Pitschka, San Juan Bautista
Blanche & John Prior, Sunnyvale
David Puliafico, Morgan Hill
Joan L. Smith, San José
Kent Stormer, Palo Alto
Bonnie Stromberg & Gary Glasby, Gilroy
Perry C. West, Los Gatos
Triger Young, Monte Sereno

Get Involved!

Step by step, we are getting closer to seeing our dream of a new visitor center realized. However, the total project, including preparation of exhibits, may require $450,000, and we are far from reaching that goal. We seek the involvement of the membership to help us complete the project. Please consider making a donation to the visitor expansion fund. Some companies have matching grant programs, which will effectively double your contribution. You might also consider volunteering your time to assist with the actual construction, donating materials to be used in construction, or helping us with our various fund-raising projects. Please contact Barbara Bessey or the park headquarters for more information.

The PRA Calendar

Sunday, September 25: Reserve this day for the PRA's twelfth annual **Fall Barbecue and Fund-raising Raffle.** Packages of raffle tickets and an order form for BBQ tickets were mailed under separate cover. The BBQ starts serving lunch at 11:30 a.m.; the raffle will take place around 1:00 p.m. Please call Roberta Wright (408/683-2219) or the park headquarters (408/779-2728) for additional information.

Thursday, September 29: The next regularly scheduled meeting of the **PRA Board of Directors.** Please call Chair Dennis Pinion (408/779-3916) to receive a copy of the meeting agenda and to receive instructions on how to reach the meeting location.

Saturday, October 1: Join the San José Astronomical Association members as they view **celestial splendors above Coe Park.** Saturn will be available in the evening sky right after sunset. You can still view the Milky Way in October; it will be spectacular overhead. The public is invited to attend. Attendees will begin to arrive by mid-afternoon but most will plan to be at the site by around 6:49 p.m. (sunset); a few devotees will stay overnight in the campground. Call the Astronomical Association for further information (408/371-1307). See you there!

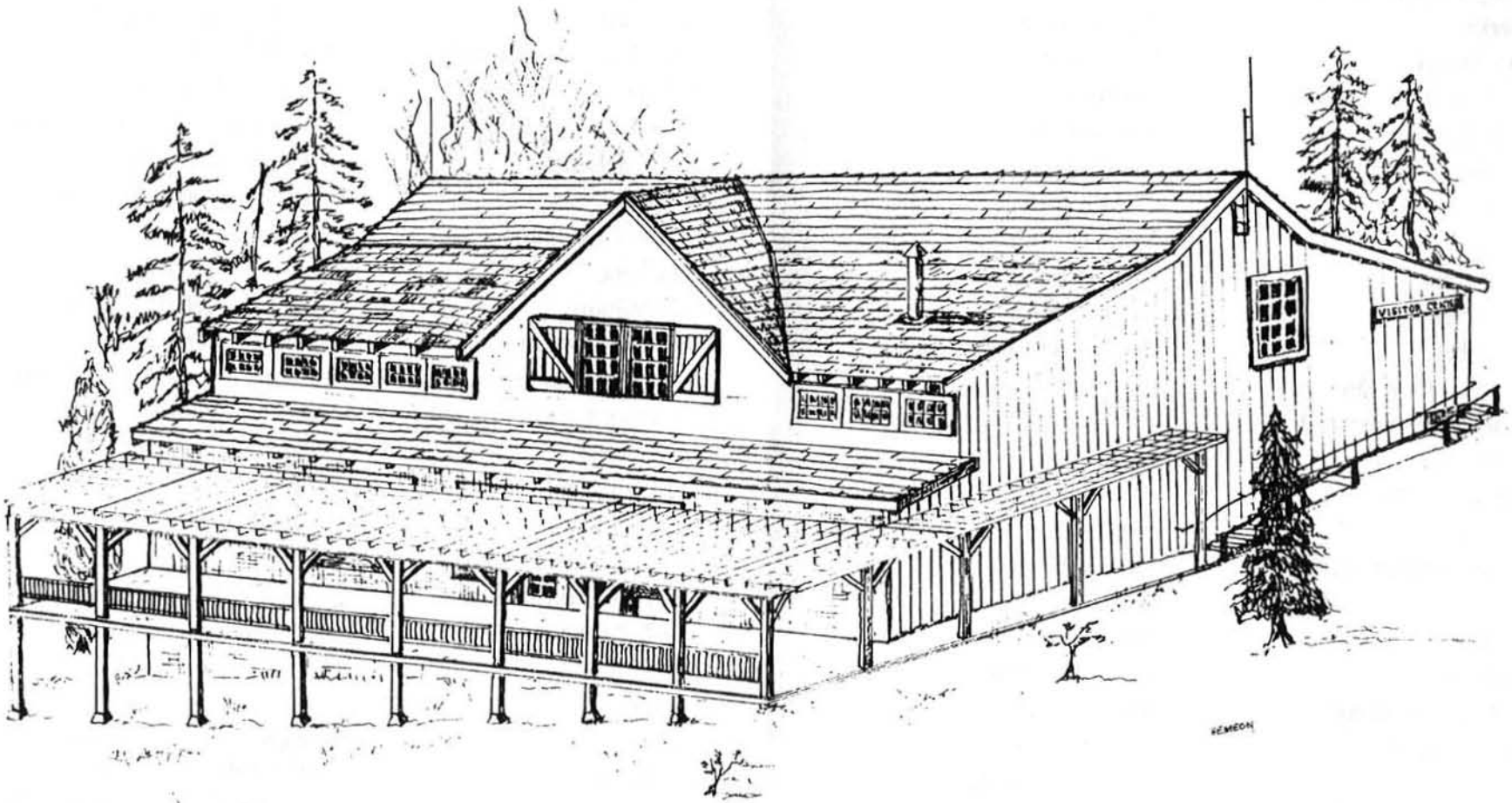
Saturday, October 8: Join PRA member and Coe Park Volunteer Larry Haimowitz for an exciting **Tarantula Walk.** It will begin at *8:00 a.m.* at the visitor center. Did you ever want to know where tarantulas live, what they eat, and ???? Join Larry for a fascinating exploration! Call the park headquarters (408/779-2728) for additional information.

Sunday, October 9: Join PRA member and Coe Park Volunteer Larry Haimowitz for a repeat of his **Tarantula Walk.** It will begin at *1:00 p.m.* at the visitor center. Call the park headquarters (408/779-2728) for additional information.

Saturday, November 12: Help build new trails or maintain existing trails in Coe Park on Saturday, November 12. This day is our **annual Trails Day** to benefit the park, and we need lots of trailblazers. Individuals wanting additional information or who wish to be trail crew leaders should call Doug Meyer (408/623-2431), Department of Parks and Recreation.

Saturday, November 26: Join the San José Astronomical Association members as they return to view **celestial splendors above Coe Park.** The public is invited to attend. Call the Astronomical Association for further information (408/371-1307).

An artist's rendition of what the completed Henry W. Coe State Park Visitor Center will look like . . .



Drawing by PRA member Rosse Hemeon

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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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