THE PINE RIDGE ASSOCIATION • HENRY W. COE STATE PARK •

The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

June 1995

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

California Buckeye

Summer is a great time of year. Any kid will tell you so. School's out, the days are getting longer, the breezes are warm, and fun is in the air. At Coe Park, the early days of summer are lovely for lots of reasons, and for me the blooming of the buckeyes is near the top of the list. I know that early summer is going to be especially fine this year. This year has been the most spectacular year for wildflowers that I've ever witnessed, and the bounty of the spring promises to flow over into the summer months. I hope you'll visit the park some soft summer evening this year. If you do, be sure to find yourself a nice buckeye tree, get up close, and breathe in the delicate fragrance of its blossoms.

I've always been fond of buckeyes, and I've read about them in several tree books to try to get to know them better, but most books just give you descriptions, like: A large shrub or tree that grows up to 25 feet tall with a broad rounded top; leaves bright green and divided into 5 to 7 leaflets; flowers white to pale rose, borne on an erect, many-flowered thyrse; fruit pear-shaped, enclosing a glossy, brown seed; nectar reportedly poisonous to bees.

I wanted to know more about buckeyes. I wanted to know them as I know people, but not like: Subject 5 foot 10 inches tall, 180 pounds, brown hair, blue eyes, tattoo of mermaid on right forearm. And not like: She graduated Stanford cum laude with a B.S.E.E., has served as a girl scout master for five years, and loves the out-of-doors.

I wanted to get close to buckeyes, and the only way to do that is to spend time with them.

The first time I tried to get to know a valley oak as a friend, I climbed into its lower limbs, settled myself in a hollow, and immediately jumped to the ground when I discovered that ants were crawling all over me. I learned three things in short order: ants are partial to valley oaks, valley oaks don't seem to mind ants, and I wouldn't make a very good oak tree.

The first time I tried to make friends with a buckeye, things turned out differently. The buckeye I climbed into had a gentle, peaceful nature. Buckeyes have lots of rough surfaces, but the trunks and branches are often liberally adorned with lichens and mosses, and my perch on my newly acquired friend was a moss-covered throne.

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A deeper glimpse into the geology of the park

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. . . and more!

I've learned that buckeye leaves are soft and sensitive. When you press an oak leaf to your cheek, the leaf feels warm to your skin, even on a cold morning. When you press a buckeye leaf to your cheek, the leaf is always cool to your skin at first, regardless of the air temperature. But in just a few seconds the warmth of your cheek will warm the leaf.

Several nature books classify buckeyes as shrubs because they often branch out from the base, without a distinct trunk. But I've decided that buckeyes truly are trees. I can't really picture myself perched in a shrub, and if you know me, you probably can't either.

Buckeyes are vulnerable to the extremes of wind and sun. They usually live in calm, sheltered spots on cool, north-facing slopes, in protected swales, and under the limbs of other trees. When a stray wind manages to find a buckeye, the whisper of its voice in the buckeye leaves is often muted by the louder chorus it makes as it passes through the over-hanging boughs of nearby oaks and bays.

Some hardier species of trees grow in areas that are frequented by the wind, and when the wind moves through their foliage, it often makes a noticeable, distinctive sound. When the wind travels through the boughs of a valley oak, it makes a deep, strong roar. When it vibrates the needles of a ponderosa pine, it makes a high, cool, modulating whistle. It's not easy to hear the wind in buckeyes, though, because of the tucked away places where they grow. But if you're patient and listen carefully, you may detect the gentle wisp of the wind's voice and sometimes the feather-soft wind chime melodies that breezes make as they flow through a buckeye's delicate leaves.

With their broad, thin, bright green leaves, buckeyes look like trees that belong in the tropics. But they've managed to develop methods of coping with the harsher conditions of temperate climates. In the sheltered areas where they prosper, their fragile leaves are protected from the sun and wind in the spring and early summer. But, to survive the hot, dry days of July and August, they've had to acquire a couple more tricks.

As the days of summer begin to get warmer, the leaflets of the buckeye trees start to fold in the middle so that only the edges are exposed to the direct rays of the sun. As the summer heat intensifies, the leaves turn brown and droopy and finally fall to the ground.

Buckeyes are the only trees in the Bay Area that drop their leaves during the summer. When you hike or drive through buckeye areas in the hotter months of the year, you might think you're seeing pockets of dead or dying trees in the midst of healthy green ones. Don't worry though; it's probably just the buckeyes taking their summer break.

The buckeye got its name from the seed inside its pear-shaped fruit. The large, smooth seed is shiny brown like the eye of a buck, and it has a round spot that resembles the pupil of an eye. The seeds contain a substance called aesculin that is believed to be toxic to humans; some people have reportedly died from eating the seeds. The seeds are said to be toxic to fish, too. Some books say that Native Americans built small dams in streams to collect pools of fish and that they tossed mashed buckeye seeds into the pools to stupefy the fish and collect them for food.

Although buckeyes have seeds that are toxic to some animals, for the most part the trees are generous providers. Ground squirrels eat their seeds and suffer no ill effects. And some books tell us that Native Americans relied on the seeds as an important source of food in years when acorns were scarce, although they had to leach the mashed seeds in water for a long time to remove the toxic aesculin.

Deer relish tender, young buckeye leaves. You can often see a browse line on buckeye foliage that shows how high deer are willing and able to stretch to get at the leaves. One summer, not too long ago, I watched a doe feeding on the leaves of a buckeye tree. She'd reach up, stick out her long wet tongue, pull a whole leaf into her mouth (five to seven leaflets worth), chew and swallow, and then go for the next one. When she'd eaten all the leaves she could reach stretching her neck as far up as she could, she reared up on her hind legs, and balanced for a bit to get a few more buckeye morsels.

I believe most of what books say about buckeyes, but I have my doubts about what some books say about buckeyes and bees. Some books claim that the nectar of buckeye blossoms is poisonous to bees. Maybe that's true of some species of buckeyes, but I don't believe that our California buckeye is anything but a friend to bees. One day I watched a horde of honeybees and lots of their relatives ravenously feeding at the blossoms of a buckeye tree. I searched for dead or ailing bees under the tree and couldn't find a single one. All kinds of insects were dancing around the flowers, including a clear-winged moth in bumblebee disguise. At least a dozen different kinds of butterflies were collecting nectar, and two of the butterflies did a beautiful mating dance on one of the blossoms.

Like the insects, I'm drawn to the gentle buckeye tree with its delicate, bright green foliage and beautiful candelabra flower clusters. I'm attracted even more powerfully by the

perfume of the flowers. Their scent, the most wonderful I've ever smelled, is both fleeting and intimate.

This is a great time of the year to take a walk at Coe Park, especially in the cooler hours of the evening. When you come up, I hope you'll walk slowly, breath in deeply the fragrant air, get a little better acquainted with some of my closest friends, and enjoy all the other blessings of the early days of summer.

The Proof in the Pudding

by Phil Frame

For those of you who read my last geo-article and thought it was written proof that I have spent too much time in the sun with my hat off, this exciting episode is an attempt to gain a bit of credibility. You may be trying to forget the theory advanced in that bit of heresy, as I too once did, but it does explain the geology of the park, the Diablo Range, the California Coast Ranges, the western United States, and even the circum-Pacific belt if we want to think globally.

I promise one day to write about events happening within the last million years or perhaps even last winter, but we need to get the **Big Picture** firmly rooted in our minds first, the key elements of that fantasy being:

- The Franciscan rocks that underlie Coe Park originated in various distant parts of the Pacific Ocean.
- Some of those rocks were dragged beneath the earth's crust and altered by high temperatures and pressures.
- Once thoroughly mixed, the rocks rose upward and are now exposed in the core of the Diablo Range.

This scenario was not revealed in a recently discovered tattered manuscript nor in a geologic vision quest; it is the result of piecing together a myriad of geologic data, and it will change as new data are added. This article's offering presents some of the methods used to arrive at the present theory. We will begin with the macro and proceed to the micro.

Seismology. By timing the first arrival of seismic energy on several distant seismographs, the location of the source earthquake can be determined. The map locations (epicenters) of these earthquakes can delineate active fault traces. By plotting the location of the earthquake within the earth's crust (hypocenter), a three-dimensional view of the fault can be developed. From this information, subduction zones, thrust sheets, and other plate tectonic features can be identified.

Rock genesis. Most rocks are assumed to have originated in environments where we can now see them forming. Basalts form from magma; sandstones with fossil clams were deposited near the marine shoreline. Metamorphic rocks are trickier and require high temperatures and pressure crucibles to see what minerals form under particular conditions.

Geologic map relationships. A surprising number of geologists have produced maps of the general area focusing on regional studies or seemingly obscure facets of particular sites. A compilation of these maps shows a Franciscan rock core outlined locally by rocks now recognized as oceanic crust (ophiolite sequence) and flanked by outward dipping sediments of similar age. The U.S. Geological Survey is presently compiling a computer-based map of the entire Diablo Range and, assuming the Survey's life will be spared by Washington's budget cutters, this will be published after another field season.

Geophysical exploration. By beating on the ground surface or exploding dynamite in shallow drill holes and then recording the arrival of this energy in a series of very sensitive microphones, a "seismic reflection" profile can be developed showing rock layers beneath the ground surface. These profiles extend surface mapping relationships into the uppermost few miles of the earth's crust.

Microscopic rock examinations. What do you do when you cannot identify that interesting rock in your hand? If you were a research geologist, you could have the rock cut to about 0.003 inch thick, mount it on a glass slide, and check it out with a special microscope using polarized light. Using this technique, otherwise overlooked minerals can be identified and the stress history of the rock examined.

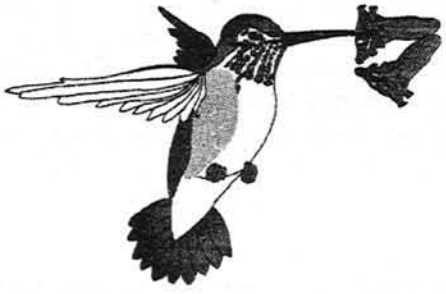
Age dating. Back in olden times, we had only the basic concept that an overlying strata was younger than the one beneath it and a few fossils found in sedimentary rocks to give us clues of a rock's age. The ages of different rocks are very important to our story, since they show so much variation over rather short distances and can be used to set timing and rates of movement for faults or tectonic mixing. These days, we have many additional techniques to estimate the age of certain, cooperative rocks (not just any rock will do).

Atomic decay: Once formed, certain elements begin to lose electrons, protons, and other atomic particles, eventually becoming a daughter element. The half-life is a rate of decay specific to a particular element and can be used to work backwards from the amount of that element presently in a mineral or whole rock to the time when the rock was formed.

Crystal damage: Imagine a newly formed crystal, smug in knowing it has started the first million years of the rest of its life, when a radioactive particle zips through, damaging some of its lattice structure. Well, it's tough being a crystal, but by studying the amount of damage (fission track, thermoluminescence, or electron spin resonance) it is possible to see how long the crystal has been taking this abuse.

Paleomagnetism: The earth has this strange habit of periodically reversing its magnetic poles, no doubt ruining the progress of orienteers. The last time this happened was 700,000 years ago (the Brunhes/Matuyama reversal). When certain fine-grained rocks are formed, magnetically susceptible minerals are oriented toward the North Pole's location at that time and remain locked in that position. One such rock is basalt, and maps of normal/reversal basalt on the ocean floor show paired stripes moving away from spreading centers in the mid-Pacific. This was one of the first bits of proof for plate tectonics.

So there you have it. There is much more evidence pointing in the direction of the tortured history of the rocks of Coe Park than these mad ramblings. As we continue this series, we will return to the plate tectonics concept with other evidence, but it is now time to focus our attention on geology we can currently see on a stroll in the park.



PRA News and Notes

The **Coe Backcountry weekend** held on April 22 and 23 was a great success. Although the spring was filled with lots of rainy days, that April weekend was blessed with beautiful sunny days, blue skies, and a profusion of wildflowers. Interpretive walks and hikes were held regularly throughout the weekend, which the visitors really seemed to enjoy. Artist Dave Sellers designed the special commemorative T-shirt for the weekend event. A large gathering around the campfire on Saturday night enjoyed a delightful program that featured John Muir and our own rangers Barry Breckling and Doug Meyers.

The Orestimba Corral Trail was renamed the Alquist Trail at a dedication ceremony held at the corral on April 22. Donald Murphy, Director of the California State Parks, gave an inspirational message to the attendees. Other speakers at the short dedication ceremony were John Kolb, Superintendent of the Four Rivers District, Winslow Briggs, Chair of the Coe Trails Advisory Committee, and Kay Robinson, Coe Park Superintendent. Kay unveiled a specially designed plaque to recognize Senator Alquist's continuing support for Henry W. Coe State Park throughout a long career of public service. Senator Alquist has been instrumental in adding key parcels of land to the park. His unflagging efforts during the 1980s led to the acquisition of the Gill-Mustang Ranch and the Coit Ranch, which enlarged Coe Park from 13,000 to 67,000 acres.

Mother's Day at Coe Park was canceled this year. This was the only one in eleven years in which Mother Nature decidedly had other plans. Heavy rains just prior to the celebrated breakfast prevented the setup that was to take place the day before. And the weather outlook predicted more threatening storms for Mother's Day. Thus, with a heavy heart, Lee Sims and the other breakfast organizers decided to cancel the event.

The **Coyote Creek entrance** to the park was open on weekends throughout the spring. The weekend hours were extended this year through the month of June. Attendance was down over the previous year, in part because of the rainy weather we encountered during the springtime. Lee Dittmann staffed the entrance each weekend, along with a number of Coe Park volunteers.

Plan now for the **1995 Coe Park Raffle**, which will take place on September 30 at the Fall Barbecue. The 1993 and 1994 raffles were very successful in augmenting our Visitor Center Expansion Building Fund. We want to do it again, and we need your help. We need people who are interested in helping to gather items for the raffle as well as people

who are interested in working on the day of the raffle. If you are interested in helping out with the raffle or if you would like to become more actively involved with our Visitor Center Expansion Building Fund projects, please call Barbara Bessey (415/851-7813) or the park (408/779-2728).

Artist **Dave Sellers** held a show at the Goose Pond Gallery during the month of May in which he featured his new oil paintings of landscapes in the Morgan Hill area. A number of the paintings depicted scenes of Coe Park.

Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery to **Dave Hildebrand** and **Winslow Briggs**. Both are very active members of the Pine Ridge Association, and they both enjoy hiking and working on Coe Park trails. Coincidentally, they also underwent surgeries within the past several months and are now on the mend. Dave and Winslow, we extend our best wishes for a speedy recovery—see you soon on a Coe Park trail!

Backcountry Coe Weekend

by Chris MacIntosh

The following article was an e-mail message sent by Chris MacIntosh, an avid Sierra Club backpacker, hiker, and outdoorsperson, to Coe Park Volunteer Libby Vincent shortly after the highly successful Backcountry Coe Weekend in April.

What a wonderful weekend. Rain, what rain?

Please tell your fellow volunteers and park staff what a good time we had at the Backcountry Coe Weekend and how grateful we are to all of you for setting this up. You ran everything so well, and all the staff seemed to be very upbeat about everything.

After hiking in the rain and cold as late as the weekend before the Backcountry Coe Weekend, it was incredible to be out in the heat, needing sunscreen and water more than anything else. The eight people in our group had a terrific time. We hiked up Mustang Peak, then along Long Ridge to Jackrabbit Lake and over to Paradise Lake. We only met a group of five backpackers (friends from the backpack section of the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club) and then a LOT of cyclists at Jackrabbit Lake who, at 3:00 p.m., were just starting up to the ridge and back to the Orestimba Corral! One interesting flower we found on top of the ridge was golden earrings (or similar), related to Dutchman's breeches and, according to the wildflower book, uncommon and appearing after fire. Very unusual looking flower.

It took us from 9.30 a.m. to about 4:00 p.m. to hike to Paradise Lake, with rest stops and stops for flowers and views. We got a nice campsite under some oaks down the creek from the lake; there were already several parties camped at the lake (including one tent that appeared in the bottom of the dry stream bed below the dam, just where it met the actual outlet creek). We just had a fairly easy walk downhill to the creek for water. It looked like every fishing pole at the lake had a fish attached to it at all times. We heard rumors that someone got a 22-inch fish but didn't see it. We were all very lazy next morning, which was very good for all these Silicon Valley types who work too hard. Two of our group, Randy and Carol, scrambled uphill to a rock outcrop where Randy met a rattlesnake; he told us later that the instruction to jump went directly from his eyes to his feet without going through his brain. The botanists, including me, wandered down the little creek valley and looked at flowers and birds—found hoary cress, which was new to us. Lots of pig tracks, also raccoon tracks, and some that looked like coyote (longer than wide). We didn't see any pigs at all on our trip. We were pleased because we saw some ladder-backed woodpeckers, which our best efforts keyed out to Nuttall's woodpeckers. Barbara Bessey later confirmed that this woodpecker is the most common one in the park.

On the way out, we met a rattlesnake sunning itself in the trail near the landing strip at Paradise Flat, so it took itself off to the nearby base of a tree and rattled madly at us. It had a very impressive set of rattles. At Hartman Creek, I went upstream a little to fill water bottles and met a couple sitting on the bank. They were watching a snake (a garter snake? it had orange stripes) that had caught a small fish and was very slowly swallowing it. The tail half of the fish stuck out from the snake's mouth, and I could see the unhinged jaw. We also met a third species of snake, a tiny little orange and drab ring-neck snake, or similar name, curled up like a worm casting.

We came back to our cars via the Orestimba Creek trail. There was no one else on it, and it was a nice relaxing stroll back to the Corral—until John and I nearly levitated off the trail when a horse whinnied loudly right behind us. One of the mounted volunteers had come along the trail and, even though she had the horse very much under control and was riding slowly, it apparently thought we were in the way and told us so!

We were very impressed by how well organized everything seemed to be. Lots of good signs. I liked the flier with trail distances and times, and you had lots of people all over the place, all in good humor. I got a T-shirt, thinking it didn't matter too much what it looked like as it was pretty much a fund-raiser for you—and what a gorgeous shirt!

Two more of our group ordered them. Of course, you realize that you now have to operate like a winery, with a new design in the series (same artist) each year!

Orestimba Creek Trail

by Winslow R. Briggs

Just a few yards south of the Orestimba Corral, the Gill Route, simply a jeep road, makes an abrupt right turn southeast out of the Orestimba Valley. It then meanders generally eastward for about half a mile before resuming its northward course. The Orestimba Valley itself continues north from this turn for about a mile and a half before turning eastward and eventually rejoining the road. The Orestimba Creek Trail begins at this sharp turn and follows the valley north along its eastern side, climbing gently without switchbacks to two scenic outlooks. Beyond the first viewpoint, it begins to turn eastward, and beyond the second, it continues to the east to begin its descent to the junction of the creek and the jeep road.

Whereas it required perhaps a short weekend to find the general line for the Orestimba Corral Trail (renamed as the Alquist Trail during April's Backcountry Coe Weekend) up to the crest of Mississippi Ridge once the correct ridge was identified, the Orestimba Creek Trail was another story. Despite the far less forbidding terrain, finding a feasible route turned out to be something of a nightmare. The first mile or so is relatively simple, as one can follow the open valley along any of innumerable lines. However, as the creek turns eastward, the valley narrows, the creek itself becomes choked with great boulders, and the walls become impossibly steep. One early route ascended through several switchbacks to pass this bottleneck before descending across a steep and unstable slope to the creek beyond its eastward turn. This route then crossed the creek where it flowed through a grassy flat, and it went into and out of several side canyons to the north of the creek. As each of the side canyons had its own side canyons, the route was not exactly direct. Once out of this convoluted maze, the route plunged into dense chamise until it finally emerged across a sloping meadow to end at the confluence of the jeep road and the creek. The route was abandoned (and many hundreds of flags removed) for several reasons. First, the route was far longer than the distance to be traveled justified. Second, the steep and unstable slope would have required some special engineering to construct a usable trail. Third, this same slope turned out to have a fair amount of exposed serpentine rock, almost certainly home to several rare plant species, and a possible source of asbestos hazard at least to trail workers if not to trail users to boot. And, finally, the grassy flat was no place for a trail as it had clearly been occupied at one time by Native Americans, judging from the blackness of the soil. It was definitely time to start over!

The present route gives no evidence of these early route-finding difficulties, and, in fact, it passes through mostly gentle terrain that belies the unexpected complexity and steepness of the ridge it follows. It is a delightful two miles long, and a return via the Gill Route makes a splendid half-day hike of not much more than four miles.

Just before the Gill Route takes its sharp right turn, the Orestimba Creek trail leads straight ahead, passes through a fence line, and heads north. It crosses level ground through open oak meadow, with a gentle rise to the right, and after about a hundred yards or so crosses a second fence line and a wooded draw. It then swings somewhat left to cross the foot of a sloping meadow covered with hundreds of clumps of one of the loveliest of the native bunch grasses, the purple needle grass (*Nassella pulchra*, formerly *Stipa pulchra*). This stand of bunch grasses is quite unusual. One seldom finds them in the open, as they usually do better in the shade where they can successfully compete with the invasive Mediterranean grass species, especially wild oats (*Avena fatua*) and foxtail or ripgut (*Bromus diandrus,* formerly *Bromus rigida*). Over a century ago, bunch grasses covered many thousands of square miles of open meadows in California, but with the arrival of the invading species, brought by the Europeans, the native species were generally completely replaced, especially in the open sunshine. For some reason, though the oats and foxtails abound nearby, there are almost none to be found among these clumps of bunch grass. There must be something special about the combination of soil type, drainage, nutrient availability, and perhaps even distinctive soil microorganisms that allow these splendid California native grasses to flourish.

As the trail swings back right again, notice the rocks on the near side of the creek to the left. On top of these are several very nice mortars, including one very deep one, further evidence of the earlier Native American inhabitants of this remote valley. Such mortars are common on rocks throughout Coe Park, but these are especially nice examples. (Another nice example, close to Park Headquarters, is found on the rocks to the right just beyond Arnold Spring, along the Springs Trail.)

You are soon traveling through an open forest of small blue oaks again, crossing several small drainages only a few yards apart from each other. Remaining on the toe of the slope, you wander briefly farther from the creek. After a short climb to avoid a steep bank cut by the flowing water, the trail levels again and then drops to the creek anew as you continue northward. Note the contrast between the forests on the east-facing slope across from you and the west-facing

slope you are on: The former is covered largely with digger pines, while the latter is covered mostly with blue oaks. Whether a slope faces the morning or afternoon sun can be crucial to which plant species can survive and flourish.

The trail goes deeply into a major canyon to the right, turning back sharply at the drainage crossing to return to the creek. A second such drainage right away followed by a third after about 200 yards leads to the beginning of a gradual climb. Before long, the trail drops slightly and then levels briefly and passes to the right of a large rock formation that drops off toward the creek. It is a great spot for a rest and a snack. Study it carefully (without getting too close to the edge). The size of a small building, it is quite shattered. Large pieces have become separated from the main mass of rock, and some have fallen into a somewhat chaotic rock pile below. It is possible to make out how some of it originally fit together, and one wonders how the breakup occurred. Was it a gradual process, or did it all happen during some great earthquake? If the latter, what did it sound like? What else happened in the neighborhood? When did it happen? Was anybody around?

In any case, the fragmented rock hosts a nice display of orange monkey flowers (*Mimulus aurantiacus*, formerly *Diplacus aurantiacus* [this "formerly" nonsense must be the way professional botanists stay ahead of the amateurs: just as soon as the amateurs have a few plant names well memorized, the professionals change them]), a number of small ferns, several mosses, several lichens, and a generous serving of poison oak.

Leaving this fascinating rock formation behind, the trail begins a steady 10% climb. You cross somewhat steeper slope for about a hundred yards, and then bear right between some very nice manzanitas, with their characteristic shiny brown bark. The trail here remains wet and muddy much longer in the springtime than other sections, indicative of water closer to the surface here than elsewhere. Whereas in other sections of the park, water near the surface would be betrayed by the occurrence of live oaks or California bay trees, the vegetation here offers no clue. It is exactly the same as elsewhere, largely open oak woodland. High and to the left across the valley, you can see a large, steep, open meadow surrounded by dense chaparral. The upper part of the difficult-to-follow Hartman Trail passes somewhere above this tangle. As the trail levels and drops slightly, the land form becomes more irregular and broken up here, with a fairly complicated mixture of small rock outcrops and drainages. The descent does not last long, and soon you are back on a steady, though not particularly steep, climb. The trail continues to thread its way through blue oaks, and soon you are far above Orestimba Creek. There are several more small drainages, and a number of dead trees that have rotted and tumbled over. These are almost entirely digger pines, a species with a far shorter life span than the neighboring blue oaks. The creek becomes even more remote as it drops progressively in parallel with your climb.

A few hundred yards further, beyond a large manzanita to your right, you make a wide swing eastward into a wooded bowl and then turn sharply back left at the crossing of another drainage to enter about thirty yards of open meadow. Here at the start of the meadow begins the first of the two scenic viewpoints. It is a great place to study the face of Mississippi Ridge. Chaparral, scattered blue oaks, large stands of digger pine, and open meadow all stand out in different colors and textures. The pattern of colors and textures changes dramatically with the seasons in late autumn when the blue oaks lose their leaves; in early winter when the meadows begin to turn a rich green; and in springtime when the flush of light green new growth appears on the oaks and other deciduous trees, and the chaparral, here largely chamise, produces thousands of spikes of white flowers. April through June sees a return to the summer pattern as the meadows turn golden and the bright green of the young leaves on both deciduous and non-deciduous trees is replaced by the darker and more somber green of the mature leaves.

If you look carefully, you should be able to see the trail slanting down to the right from the top of Mississippi Ridge to Board Spring, near the head of a steep valley to the northwest. (On our first visit to Board Spring to measure how fast the water was flowing, we were challenged by the unmistakable dry buzz of a rattlesnake. Since the spring was choked with vegetation and the rattlesnake chose to remain invisible someplace within it, we decided that measuring the flow rate really wasn't very important after all, and left the scene quietly, carefully, and rapidly.)

As you leave the scenic viewpoint, you make a serious turn eastward, reflecting the change in direction of the creek far below, and climb slightly through more very nice open blue oak forest (this route has lots of shade!). Within about two hundred yards you reach the high point on the trail and the second scenic viewpoint. Between you and the creek is the unstable serpentine slope mentioned earlier, now a safe distance below. Mount Stakes, the highest ridge far to the north, has come gradually into view. A large part of the Orestimba Basin, here an extremely broad wilderness, is now in front of you. It is well worth a pause to enjoy the 270° panorama. Watch for the Rooster Comb just east of north. Its rocky crest, rising from a broad steep meadow, barely above the more distant horizon formed by a low point in the mountain ridges behind it. The viewpoint is nicely supplied with small rock outcrops and some beautiful specimen manzanitas, plus both Clarkias and Brodiaea lilies

(*Dichelostemma capitatum*, formerly *Brodiaea pulchella*: AAAAARGH!).[1]

After a pause to take in the view, you begin a gradual descent through the somewhat thicker vegetation of the now north-facing slope, a mixture of digger pines, lots of manzanitas, small blue oaks, and a number of other shrubs including mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus betuloides*). The development of the fruit of this latter species is fascinating. After fertilization, the base swells into a structure the shape of a large elongate grain of rice, but with a slender projection that may be more than two inches long extending straight out from its tip. As this projection dries, tiny strips of epidermis pop out, remaining attached at their basal end. This process begins at the extreme tip of the projection and proceeds basally back to the apex of the fruit proper until the entire structure is covered with fine bristles. The quantity of these hairy fruits is so great that the entire shrub takes on a silvery sheen when seen from a distance. At the same time, the projection twists to form a spiral in a plane at right angles to the long axis of the fruit. Finally, the entire fruit separates at its base, and floats lazily spinning to the ground. The structure and its fine bristles act as an odd kind of parachute, allowing the winds to disperse these fruits and their component of seeds great distances.

As you thread your way through the underbrush, you should have occasional glimpses of the rugged terrain to the north, and as you continue to swing further eastward, more and more of Long Ridge, the major ridge running north-east from Mustang Peak, comes into view. At one point the trail levels off to pass under the fat horizontal branch of a gnarled oak and cross a pleasant lateral grassy spur ridge that you will follow most of the way down to the creek. You are now back in open oak forest.

The trail drops for a hundred yards or so and then recrosses the spur, makes an S-turn, re-recrosses, dropping for a short distance at about a 13% grade, makes its first switchback, re-re-recrosses to switchback 2, and then re-re-re-recrosses only to curve back left and re[5]cross the spur (follow that?). Keep an eye out for good views through this section. (This criss-crossing may seem a bit ridiculous, but consider the alternative—a trail straight down the ridge crest. Once water begins to erode such a trail, there is soon no way to build water bars and repair it. Particularly horrible examples of what can happen when a trail follows the top of a descending ridge are the old and now replaced trail from Manzanita Point down to China Hole, in places a micro-canyon, and stretches of the Pacheco Route from the East Fork of Coyote Creek to Willow Ridge).

The slope is now on your left as you follow the broad flank of the ridge westward into a pygmy forest of digger pines and a third switchback. The more distant views are gradually lost as you descend. Soon you are almost down to the Orestimba Creek again. Back on an easterly course, the trail traverses the flank almost on the level before rounding the end of the spur, turning gradually right, and heading almost due south. (Two young bucks, velvet still on their small antlers, interrupted my concentration on note-taking along this flank.) Almost immediately you can see the Gill Route (patrol road) just a short distance below. Close on the left is a jutting rock, an elegant place to sit in the shade and rest. You shortly cross a very stony drainage before making a broad arc back left across a small meadow to join the Gill Route a hundred yards short of the confluence of Orestimba Creek and a small tributary coming in from the right. You are now at the extreme toe of the ridge that provided you with a route down.

Although this trail is short (about two miles long, as mentioned above, and with an elevation gain only 210 feet and a subsequent drop of 360), it provides a wonderful opportunity to stroll unhurriedly through some lovely wilderness, and it provides a spectacular view deep into rugged terrain both near and distant. The Gill Route provides an attractive alternative back south to the Orestimba Corral, but you would make no mistake if you returned the way you came.

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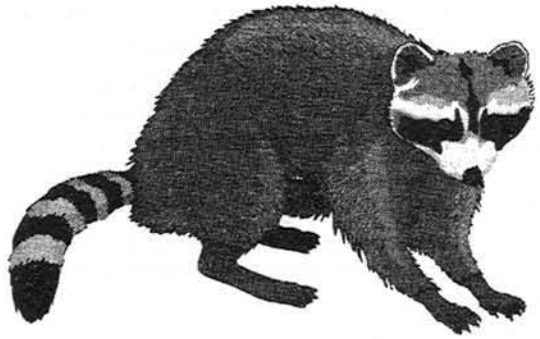
[1] The Clarkias undoubtedly belong to some well-known species of the genus *Clarkia*. However, I did not have my copy of the Jepson Manual, Higher Plants of California, along on the warm day in May when I took these notes. This monstrous tome weighs about six pounds and measures 8-1/2 by 11 by 2 inches. To make matters worse, Jepson lists forty species of *Clarkia*. Finally, ten of these have from two to four subspecies, making all in all a total of sixty possibilities. Some, of course, could be eliminated on the basis that they are only to be found in Shasta County or some other distant spot, but sorting the Coe *Clarkia* from the others on the basis of memory of a vaguely pink-purple flower could be a bit difficult! However, according to Lee Dittmann's 1983 preliminary checklist of the vascular plants of Henry W. Coe State Park, Coe Park has only five *Clarkia* species, and this slender one most likely is *Clarkia affinis*.



Moonlight Daylight Burra Burra Hike Hike

by Lee Sims

Ever wonder about the night life at Coe? Well, come and check it out for yourself!

We will hike **without flashlights** from the Dowdy Ranch buildings around Burra Burra peak on Saturday night, August 12, after dark. The total distance is less than three miles. We will also ascend Burra Burra, a quick side trip, and view much of the Hamilton Range over to the Gavilan Range and beyond towards Big Sur, and also south beyond Pacheco Pass to the San Carlos range—spectacular under moonlight. The following morning we will repeat the hike and observe the differences between night sounds and scenes and those in the daytime.

The Dowdy Ranch has toilet facilities. For camping—which is recommended—bring your own food, drinking water, camping gear, and a chair. Stoves but not utensils will be available. Plan to arrive after 1 p.m. and no later than 8:30 p.m. on Saturday, August 12.

If you are afraid of your shadow, you might not want to come. The moon will be so bright you will see your own shadow; the mood will be so dramatic you will feel the shadows of people who walked these same trails hundreds of years ago.

Call me at 415/726-4958 or Roberta Wright at 408/683-2219 for more information and to sign up.

An Invitation to Join the Volunteer Program

Would you like to learn more about Henry W. Coe State Park—its history, interesting animals, beautiful wildflowers, singing birds—and share your knowledge with park visitors? Then consider joining approximately 100 others who donate some of their time to the Volunteer Program of the Pine Ridge Association.

The Volunteer Program adds to the park visitor's knowledge, interest, enjoyment, and safety by assisting regular park employees through interpretation, operation of the visitor center, patrolling the park trails, and by carrying out special projects. Volunteers receive free admission to Coe Park and other parks in the Four Rivers District, receive discounts on purchases from the PRA, and, more importantly, receive the satisfaction derived from doing a job well and providing a necessary service to the public and to the park. In addition, most volunteers find that the initial training and the continuing workshops and classes offered for volunteers each year are of significant value.

Topics tentatively scheduled for inclusion in the next series of training classes are geology and map reading, plant communities, ecology and animals, birds and wildflowers, history of Coe Park, being a volunteer, interpretive techniques, and first aid. Additional optional training classes will be held throughout spring 1996 on topics such as wildflowers, birds, tracking, and how to plan an interpretive program. Training will be held at the park on weekends from September 16 through December 2, 1995; graduation will be held on February 3, 1996.

Applications are available now at Coe Park headquarters. **August 20 is the deadline for receipt of applications.** Applicants have their choice of interview dates (August 26, 27, or 31). Some interviews will be held at Coe Park, while others will be held at a location in Morgan Hill. If you have any questions or if you would like to obtain an application, call the park at 408/779-2728.

Wreck Chasing

by Ken Miller

Hi! My hobby is researching and visiting historic aircraft wreck sites. I have been to three sites in the Santa Cruz mountains, and I know of a handful of sites in the Diablo Range north of Coe Park. My long-term goal is to make a display of Bay Area wreck sites at the California Antique Aircraft Museum in Morgan Hill.

I have a lead that there could be a site located within the Coe Park boundaries. Is there anyone in the association who has information about the site, or who is interested in looking for it? The plane is a Douglas DC-3, which is a twin-engine propeller plane that could carry about 25 passengers, and it was in use from the 1940s to the 1970s. I don't have any information about the date of the crash, but I have been told that the craft might be located at the east end of Blue Ridge. More specifically, the location may be near a latitude of 37°12' North and a longitude of 121°30' West.

Please call me (408/866-1240) if you have any information about the wreck or if you have any interest in helping me find it.

Membership & Contributions
by Lee Dittmann

As of June 7th, we welcomed a number of new members to our organization, bringing the total number of memberships to 316. Thank you all for your support, and welcome to the Pine Ridge Association!

Betty Allin, Sunnyvale
Matthew Byrnes, San Francisco
Andra Cassen, Palo Alto
Rod Derbyshire & Mary Ann Carmack, Menlo Park
Brett Dickson, San Jose
Laura Durica, Morgan Hill
Joe & Marge Edwards, Salinas
Ric & Joanne Heinzen, Gilroy
Walter & Marianne Kerl, Saratoga
Don & Pat Kerr, Cupertino
Tony Kramer, Palo Alto
Todd Macomber, San Francisco
S.B. Meyer, San Jose
Terry & Jayne Mulhern & family, San Jose
Dory Ptak, Campbell
Mike R. Raugh, Mountain View
Dawn & Tom Schaeffer, Campbell
William & Marie Silbermann, Morgan Hill
Travis & Juli Smith, Gilroy
Jackie Stephens, Los Altos
Louise Stevens, Menlo Park
D. Joan White, Morgan Hill
Ron Zanker, La Grange

New Contributors to the Visitor Center Expansion Fund

Betty Allin
Monica Driggers
Laura Durica
Marianne C. Moore
Dory Ptak
William & Marie Silbermann
Jackie Stephens
Louise Stevens
Alan & Pat Walker

Special Gifts

In Memory of Molly Hemeon Adkins a generous special gift to the Visitor Center Expansion Fund has been donated on the anniversary of her birth (April 6, 1927) by her brother **Rosse Hemeon.**

PRA Calendar

Thursday, July 27: The next regularly scheduled meeting of the PRA Board of Directors will be held at the home of Barbara Bessey and Kevin Gilmartin in Woodside, California. All PRA members are invited to attend. Please contact PRA Chair Dennis Pinion for more information (408/779-3916).

Saturday and Sunday, August 12 & 13: The annual Moonlight Daylight Burra Burra Hike Hike. See the article in this issue for more details. This is a wonderful opportunity to see the eastern side of the park near Dowdy Ranch by the light of the moon. Additional information about the weekend can be obtained from Roberta Wright (408/683-2219) or Lee Sims (415/726-4958).

Sunday, August 20: Deadline for submitting an application to become a PRA volunteer in Coe Park. Applications are available now at Coe Park headquarters (408/779-2728).

Saturday, August 26, Sunday, August 27, & Thursday, August 31: Persons interested in becoming Coe Park volunteers will be interviewed (see the article in this issue for more details).

Saturday, September 30: The annual Fall Barbecue will be held at Coe Park headquarters. A flyer will be distributed to the membership later this summer.

Be a part of the future by preserving the past!
Support the Visitor Center Expansion!

Join the Pine Ridge Association

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State ___ Zip _____

Telephone ( ) _____

Membership Categories

	Individual	Family
Basic	☐ $10	☐ $16
Contributor	☐ $15	☐ $26
Supporter	☐ $25	☐ $46
Sponsor	☐ $50	☐ $95
Benefactor	☐ $100	☐ $195
Donor	☐ $200	☐ $395
Life	☐ $300	☐ $595

Special needs discount memberships:

Senior (age 62 and over)	☐ $5	☐ $8
Student (full-time)	☐ $5	☐ $8

Membership dues: $ _____

Contribution to Visitor Center Expansion Fund: $ _____

Additional contribution: $ _____

Total amount enclosed: $ _____

Since 1975, the Pine Ridge Association (PRA) has provided educational and interpretive programs and services for visitors at Henry W. Coe State Park.

Your membership is an excellent way to show your support for the park and assist in maintaining interpretive programs in these times of limited state resources.

All membership levels entitle you to a subscription to *The Ponderosa*, a 15% discount on purchases of books, maps, T-shirts, and other items in the Visitor Center, and a vote in PRA elections (two votes for Family memberships). Members receive advance notice of special events and activities and are also eligible to apply for admittance to the volunteer training program.

In addition, membership categories of $15 or more are entitled to receive a free gift.

PRA memberships expire at the end of the calendar year. Memberships of persons joining after July 1, 1995, are valid until the end of the 1996 calendar year.

Please make checks payable to the ***Pine Ridge Association.***

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Henry W. Coe State Park
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(408) 779-2728

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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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