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

The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

January 1997

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

Life on the Pine Ridge Ranch

I've lived in Henry "Harry" Coe's old ranch house for 19 years now, and every now and then someone asks me what it's been like. I usually say that it's cold in the winter and hot in the summer. If the wind's blowing outside, the house is drafty and sometimes even breezy inside. If the wind's blowing really hard, the whole house shakes and creaks like a ship in a storm. The old place seems to be slowly sinking into the earth, from its outside edges in. A walk from the living room to one of the outside rooms is a noticeable downhill trip. Off and on throughout the years, mischievous ghosts have come to visit. The windows in the house are interesting, too. I lived here for years before I realized that no two windows are alike. No wonder sets of curtains never seemed to work out quite right. My home for the last 19 years has been a single-wall constructed, mudsill-set-on, sometimes haunted, antiquated old abode.

Living in the old ranch house, in the shadow of the Coe family, has been one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life. But I'll soon be moving to a spacious new "manufactured" house with central heating, insulated walls, more than sufficient closet space, a magnificent view, earthquake bracing, and lots more. I'll miss the old ranch house, but time moves on, and time always brings change. How will the old ranch house change with time? It might be used for meetings and training sessions. A bedroom or two might become offices. I hope it will be opened to the public, at least in part, so that people for generations to come can walk inside and imagine what it was like to live this far out in the mountains just after the turn of the century. One thing will remain the same as long as this little house stands. It will always hold the memories of an earlier time when life was simple, life was hard, and life was good.

It was still dark when Harry woke up, but he knew that dawn was not far off as the rooster had already announced its near arrival. When his feet touched the cold floor, a shiver went up his shoulders and neck. He had to find his clothes in the dark, but his path from the bedroom to the living room was dimly lit by the orange glow of the few remaining coals in the fireplace. He moved the screen aside, pushed the live coals together, and stacked three logs on top. At least the living room would be warm by the time the rest of the family got up.

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Harry dressed in front of the fire and went to the front door to put on his cold, stiff boots and his Levi jacket. The jacket wouldn't keep him warm, but the morning's work soon would. First to the barn to milk the cow and feed the horses. With that done, he carried an armload of small pieces of split oak from the woodshed to the cookhouse, which was attached to the main house by a narrow porch. The woodshed was less than a quarter full, which meant that warmer days were on their way and that days of pulling and pushing the double buck and swinging the double bit lay ahead.

Harry started a fire in the cookstove. Then he went to the chicken coop, fed the chickens, and collected a half dozen eggs. "Not bad for the cool days we've been having," he said to himself. One old white leghorn hen had not been laying for several weeks. Chicken stew would be on the menu soon. He got a three-pound slab of salt pork from the cooler shed, carried the eggs and the pork to the cookhouse, and left them there for Rhoda, who was just getting out of bed.

Rhoda put on her heavy robe and lit the kerosene lantern she kept next to the bed. She carried the lantern into the living room, set it on the mantel, and sat down in the old rocking chair to put on her slippers. As she opened the front door, she paused for a moment to gaze at the pink glow of dawn silhouetting the distant mountains to the east, and then she hurried through the cold to the cookhouse. The fire Harry had started in the stove was going well and had cut the chill in the drafty little building. She felt warm and cozy, even though the cold breezes slipping into the cookhouse cooled her bare ankles.

Two cups of flour, a large pinch of salt, two teaspoons of baking powder, a quarter cup of bacon drippings, and a cup of homemade buttermilk . . . .

Even though Rhoda made lots of buttermilk, cheese, and butter, their milk cow always produced more milk than she could use, and she often gave the extra milk to the dog, the cats, and even the calves.

. . . Thirty stirs with the fork, twelve heaping spoonfuls into the biscuit pan, a little taste with the finger—perfect. She wrapped a towel around the oven door handle, pulled the door open, slid the biscuit pan into the oven, and gently closed the door. After she rearranged the coals in the firebox to adjust the heat of the stove, she began to cut bacon strips from the slab of salt pork and lay them in the big cast-iron frying pan.

Harry had made a trade with Preston Thomas—butter and milk for a young pig. They kept the dressed pig hung in the cooler shed overnight and wrapped a blanket around it during the day to keep the cold in and the flies away; it would last for a few weeks that way.

Rhoda turned the handle on the coffee grinder, and as the smell ascended to her nose, she closed her eyes and took in a deep whiff. It was a smell of the morning, a smell she never grew tired of. When she measured the grounds into the coffee pot and gave them a quick stir, she enjoyed that smell too, almost as much as she would enjoy drinking a cup of coffee on this cool morning.

She removed the crisp bacon from the frying pan and poured some of the drippings into the metal cup she kept on the warming shelf of the stove just for that purpose. She set the frying pan back on the stove in a slightly cooler spot, broke two fresh eggs into the pan, and slipped the empty eggshells into the coffee pot to settle the grounds. If she hadn't cooked eggs that morning, she would have settled the grounds by pouring a little cold water around the inside edge of the pot.

As the rays of the rising sun, shining through the eastern window, projected orange images on the cookhouse walls, Rhoda pulled the pan of perfectly browned biscuits out of the oven.

Henry and Sada slept through the rooster crowing and Mom and Dad getting up, but the smell of bacon and biscuits drifting into the house brought them out of their dreams. They were up, dressed, and sitting at the table when Rhoda carried in their steaming hot breakfast plates. She set the plates on the table and headed back out to the cookhouse. Sada carefully sliced a hot biscuit open and began to spread butter on the bottom half. Henry tore open both of his biscuits and told his sister to hurry up and pass the butter. Harry and Rhoda came in, each holding a warm breakfast plate. Rhoda took the plates and set them on the table, as Harry took off his coat and hung it by the door. Before Rhoda sat down, she got a jar of sweet apricot jam from the kitchen cupboard and handed it to Sada. Rhoda had made the jam last summer with apricots picked from their orchard just west of the house. She'd also canned quince jam, applesauce, and jelly made from wild elderberries and gooseberries the kids had collected.

After breakfast, Rhoda made peanut butter sandwiches for the kids while they searched through the cooler shed for some snacks to add to their lunches. They each grabbed a tart apple from a barrel in the corner, apples picked last fall from the orchard near the abandoned Arnold homestead. Henry grabbed a handful of dried apricots from one jar and some venison jerky from another. After all, his father was always saying that he was a growing boy. Sada found two apples that were starting to spoil and put them in her pockets to save for the horses. She'd been taught that one bad apple can spoil the whole barrel.

The kids got their lunch sacks from Rhoda and saddled their horses for the 20-minute ride to the other side of Madrone Soda Springs Canyon. They could see the school, less than a

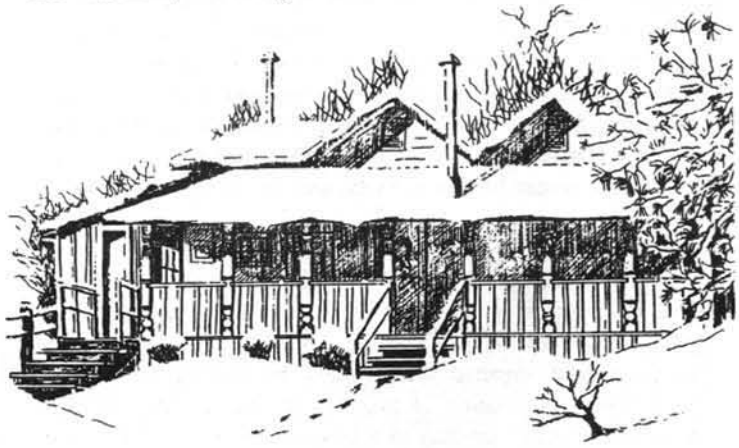
half mile away, but the canyon was too steep to cross, so they'd have to go around to the Hogsback and down Cordoza Ridge until they came to the little one-room schoolhouse on Schoolhouse Ridge. Sada fed each horse an apple and gave her father a kiss goodbye. She and Henry climbed on their horses and headed out at a walk, each knowing that when they reached the spot where they could look down and see San Jose, they'd break into a gallop and race each other to school. Even though Sada was five years younger, she often beat her brother when they raced. She loved to ride, and her big sorrel quarter horse could handle the steep and rugged terrain as well as any other horse in the hills. She especially loved to help her father gather cattle on horseback.

With the kids off to school, Rhoda got dressed, finished washing the dishes, and started to wash clothes. Her stove didn't have a hot water heater, so she heated water on top of the stove in a large copper washtub. Since it was still cold outside, she did the laundry inside the cookhouse. If it had been summer, she would have carried the tub and scrub board outside to wash clothes. She loved basking in the warmth of the summer sun, but she certainly didn't miss cooking and working around the stove on hot summer days.

Harry grabbed his lunch, gave Rhoda a hug, and mounted his horse. This morning he headed for Blue Ridge, leading a packhorse loaded down with rock salt and tools. Today was the day he'd set aside for fixing the spring box and trough at Tule Spring and for putting rock salt out for the cattle. He would put the salt in boxes and set the boxes in areas where his cattle hadn't recently grazed. He also planned to spend several hours moving the cattle around with the help of Bruce, his cattle dog. He didn't really need to move the cattle (the rock salt would eventually accomplish that), but he liked to work cattle with his horse, and it would keep the cattle from becoming wild and skittish around people and dogs.

Harry found himself returning through the Arnold Field as the sun neared the western horizon. He stretched out a tired arm and used his fingers to measure the distance between the horizon and the sun. Two fingers; he still had 30 minutes before the sun set. Time enough to get back, unsaddle, and unload the horses before dark. The kids would have their chores done and dinner would be on the table by the time he finished washing up, using Rhoda's homemade soap and the water pitcher and bowl he'd packed all the way from the East when he brought his new bride to California.

As he approached the large, lone pine near the edge of the Arnold field, he stopped to rest for a moment and reflect on the day. With his arms crossed on top of the saddle horn, he looked to the west, toward his home. The colors of a magnificent sunset spread across the land and the sky, and he could just pick out the outline of his little ranch house, nestled among the silhouetted oaks and pines. He'd done some hard work today, but he'd also taken time to enjoy the beauty of the early wildflowers, the gorgeous views from the ridge tops, and the freshness of the briskly flowing streams. Life was simple, life was hard, life was good.



Soda Springs

submitted by Teddy Goodrich

While researching in old issues of The Gilroy Advocate, *I came across the following article about the Madrone Soda Springs.*

"Soda Springs — Last week we gave a description of that now celebrated summer resort, Gilroy Hot Springs. Since that time we learn that the Soda Springs, some four and one-half miles from these up the Coyote Creek, are being put in condition for the receipt of visitors. A nice flower garden, orchard, and vineyard, together with pleasure grounds, have already been set out, and a horseback trail is now being made between the two springs. When this is completed, a number of saddle animals will be put on the route for the convenience of those who desire to visit this new attraction. This soda spring is pronounced by competent judges to be one of the finest in the state, whose medicinal properties are valuable for many complaints, especially general debility. One great drawback to the proper development of this section of the country is the lack of a good country road. Burnett Township *[the small community of Madrone; it was the center of commerce before Morgan Hill developed into a recognized community]* requires a road from the Warm Springs, running westward, to place the settlers in that section in communication with the balance of the county. At present they are completely isolated and are compelled to trespass upon their neighbors' property when wishing to get out."

Gilroy Advocate, May 17, 1873

Resource Inventory, Redfern Addition

by Libby Vincent

The former Redfern Ranch was acquired by the State of California in 1994 as an addition to Henry W. Coe State Park. The new addition of 11,211 acres was divided into 34 areas, ranging in size from 80 to 560 acres, to be inventoried by park staff and Pine Ridge Association volunteers. Volunteers, organized by the resourceful and indefatigable Lee Sims, adopted areas and set out to discover, explore, and document water resources, fences, vegetation, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, Native American sites, geologic features, survey corners, trails, recent human activity, and anything else of possible interest.

I adopted Area 15, which is 410 acres on the east side of the Redfern, dropping from the lower slopes of Burra Burra Peak down to Cañada de la Dormida. My area is steep, south-facing, rugged, impenetrable in parts, blazing hot in summer, has a robust population of poison oak, and is very steep in most areas. After landing in a heap at the bottom of a gully on a visit earlier in the year, I know what kind of area I'll select in the next resource inventory—one that's accessible. Mellow. Flat. Maybe even paved.

I paid another visit to Area 15 the day after the annual moonlight daylight Burra Burra Peak hike hike in August 1996. I have included in the following report background information from reports of some of my previous visits to Area 15:

It was cool and pleasant at the Dowdy at 9:15 a.m. as I headed out, a much more bearable temperature than my last visit in June when it was in the 90s. And no flies. I skirted the north side of Burra Burra and walked across its oak-dotted, grassy western shoulder following the faint trail that drops gently and then more steeply down to Cañada de la Dormida. That trail becomes a four-wheel-drive track along the creek bed beyond Area 15, ascends abruptly to Vasquez Peak, and undulates to Willson Ranch along a ridge top with astonishing views.

Two does sprang, startled, from the shade of a group of live oaks and disappeared over the hill. Months earlier when I was leaving the Bell Station gate after an exploration of my area, I had met Henry Coletto, the County Fish and Game Warden. According to Henry, the deer population has been declining for a number of years, primarily because of diseases—adenovirus, bluetongue virus, and EHD (epizootic hemorrhagic disease). Henry asked me how many deer I had seen that day; I said seven or eight, thinking that was quite a lot, and he said that years ago I would have seen a hundred. Apparently cattle introduce the diseases, and a gnat is the vector; outbreaks are especially prevalent around water holes and ponds where cattle—and wildlife—gather to drink. As the cattle population is removed from the park, the disease will die out, but it's still very common now. Fawns are especially vulnerable. I asked Henry if the declining deer population would affect the mountain lion population, and he said that it didn't seem to be doing so. He said mountain lions would hunt pig if there weren't enough deer around; he had seen carcasses of 150-pound pigs that had been brought down by a mountain lion.

As I walked on down the shoulder to the west from Burra Burra Peak, I glimpsed a small egg in the dry grass. On closer examination it was not an egg but an exquisite oak gall, rounded and creamy white with, on one side, a shading of pink as delicate as the first blush of sunrise.

A fence about halfway down the hill marks the boundary between the present Coe Park and the Redfern addition. There's an informal gate in the fence that you unhook, drag aside, and step through. I turned west and downhill, on the Redfern side of the fence because it's less steep than the Coe side and is slightly easier to traverse. On my last visit in June, I had found a spring 20 feet on the Coe side of the fence, a third of a mile or so west of the informal gate, and I wanted to check it out again. It had been exciting to find a developed spring that no one knew was there, but I learned that only fellow park people had any interest when I raved about my find. You need to be one of the Coe cognoscenti to understand the value of water in the backcountry.

I squeezed under the fence and found the spring just as I had left it on my last visit in June—a round metal tank about five feet in diameter, three feet deep, and a few feet away an old, decrepit trough in a sagging wooden frame, empty, rusting out, partially covered lengthwise by a thick plank. Now, however, the tank wasn't full with water that was overflowing and dripping slowly downhill; the water in the tank was now 4–5 inches below the top, but still full of weeds and algae, so it must be a permanent supply. The spring is in a deeply shaded bowl in the ravine, surrounded by bay laurel, buckeye (looking desiccated now), blue oak, toyon, live oak, and, just uphill from the spring, gray pine. So many well-worn animal trails crisscross the area that it seems like Piccadilly Circus for wildlife, but with precious water at the center rather than a small, elegant statue of Eros.

There were still some cool pools of water in the small creek bed nearby, but no discernible flow. I sat quietly for half an hour listening to birds, hoping that a mountain lion would appear. I saw her so clearly in my mind's eye—a mature female dipping her white muzzle into the tank to take a deep drink of water, her ears twitching, her long, dark-tipped tail swishing. She was glossy and sleek, a pale buff in color, her strong legs and big feet primed to leap in an instant in pursuit of prey. A breeze stirred the branches; I watched two dark-eyed juncos

splashing in the pools of water, and a woodpecker swooped by.

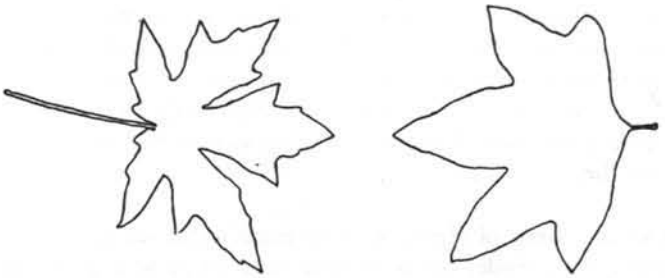
An old road leads out north and west from the spring. It's getting very overgrown now as it wends its way up the hill into the chaparral. It could have been an access road perhaps when the spring was built, but it is slowly becoming part of the hillside again.

I walked out into the sunshine; the temperature was a delightful 75° or so now, the sky clear and blue. I kept moving down and around the hillside to the south, toward the creek that flows from the north into Cañada de la Dormida forming the boundary between Area 15 and Area 10 to the west. This is a grassy hillside with a good number of gray pine and blue oak. In a small drainage, a gray pine had been felled by an easterly wind, the trunk snapped off 30 or so feet up. I wondered what fearsome gust had knocked the tree down, blowing not from the west or southwest like the usual prevailing winds. Probably, the hills and ravines in this part of the Redfern are sufficiently steep, deep, and rugged to deflect winds and wrap them around the contours of the land in many different directions. Nearby was another downed gray pine, knocked over in the same direction, but quite green still so it must have been a recent fall. As it came down, it had snapped a branch off a blue oak whose leaves were now brown.

I finally reached Cañada de la Dormida and walked along it as it flowed, or rather trickled, a little east of southeast toward the eastern boundary of the Redfern addition a mile or so away. When I had first explored here in June of 1995, I had written "there were two good-sized sycamores in the stream upstream from a narrow, rocky defile. There was a big pool of water right below the rocky defile so no way of going through without getting really wet; I scrambled up and around the defile on a heavily used animal track paralleling the creek to the north, 20–30 feet up the bank." I had no need to scramble up the bank in August of 1996. The water was much reduced in volume; it was about three feet below high-water mark on the surrounding rocks and was about 15 feet in length, 10 feet wide, and at most 3 feet deep. No chance to swim laps here, but I had a nice paddle.

The pool was surrounded by rock, gravel, and some sand. In a shady corner, I found some deep but indecipherable prints in the sand where creatures had come to drink.

A pond turtle plopped into the water as I sat quietly, and I waited in vain for it to reappear. There was a steady breeze blowing downstream, stirring the scattered brown leaves of maple, sycamore, and bay laurel. It's easy to distinguish between maple and sycamore leaves. The maple leaf has a long, red stem (one here was nine inches long), deep lobes, and fine points—reminds me of a long-necked swan. The sycamore leaf has a short stem, shallow lobes, and chunkier dimensions than the maple—reminds me of a ruddy duck. There are several big sycamores along the stream here, drinking up the water above and below ground.



I lay back on some soft sand in the creek bed to enjoy the sights. There were lots of bees and a butterfly drinking, but no birds. There were some flies, but not nearly as many as during my visit in June; after all, it's much cooler, and the breeze is steady. I gazed up and watched a patch of deep blue sky encircled by the tops of gray pines heavily laden with cones, sycamore, oak, and bay laurel, all tossing in the breeze. Straight as an arrow, an American kestrel traversed the patch of blue.

I walked back up the creek and turned up the hill toward Burra Burra, the Dowdy Ranch, and home. On the trail just up from the creek, the top half of another large gray pine had crashed to the ground in the same direction as the two I saw earlier. I don't remember this fallen pine from my visit in June, nor do I remember since then wind severe enough to have this effect on objects in its path. It's a long but familiar walk back up that steep hill, which is mainly blue oak-gray pine grassland bordering chaparral in places. Area 15 is bifurcated by a deep ravine; to the east of the ravine, there are no gray pines other than one or two in Cañada de la Dormida; to the west of the ravine, gray pine and blue oak predominate. Curious.

Now it's December, and California is being buffeted by strong winds and drenching rain. Snug and warm at home, I imagine that the big pool is bursting with water, which is raging down Cañada de la Dormida. I would certainly have to scramble up the bank around the rock outcrop to get past the pool today. Probably some more gray pines have been felled by raging winds. And once again I see, in my mind's eye, that mountain lion. She's resting now on a rock outcrop under an overhang, her eyes half closed, panting. Her coat is wet, but she'll soon dry out in a little mild afternoon sun. Her tummy is full from the deer carcass she's been eating, and she's keeping an eye on her domain, alert as always for signs of life. Best of all, she's carrying two kittens; they'll be born in January, and their fur will have rows of small, irregular black spots until maturity. I hope they survive and thrive on this hillside. Maybe I'll be lucky enough to see them on my next visit.

At Large in the Redfern

by Patrick Diehl and Victoria Woodard

Eds. Note: This is the first of a series of articles on hikes into the newly acquired Redfern property, written by Patrick Diehl and Victoria Woodard and illustrated by Ivar Diehl. Having experienced our own "aha" discovery that Coe Park is much larger than the area around the headquarters, we delight in sharing the excitement and enthusiasm expressed by Patrick and Tori.

Our discovery of Henry W. Coe came about six years ago. For quite a while, we were more than happy to keep to the northwestern section, in the vicinity of the headquarters, but as time passed, and the trails we were walking grew more and more familiar, we began to cast a longing eye toward the hinterlands to the east, beyond Willow Ridge and too far from Pine Ridge for even a very long day-hike to reach. We were also curious about a place called Gilroy Hot Springs that appeared on our California road map, but it seemed too far to the south to bear any relation to Coe and our hiking projects.

One day as we were studying the park map, we had a "eureka" moment: not only was there a trailhead at the southern edge of the park, but the road that led to it also led to the hot springs! The protected world of Coe and the unprotected world beyond it suddenly became a single geography for us. And destinations like Kelly Lake, Coit Lake, Willson Field Hill, and (even) Pacheco Falls now lay within our reach.

They also lay—all of them—on the far side of Jackson Peak, a 1,700-foot climb up from the trailhead down on Coyote Creek. In the years that followed, we made that climb too many times to count, paying our dues in the mud above Woodchopper Spring and on the steep grades in the open meadows that lay beyond, rewarded each time by the wide views that opened around us from the ridge top, often including (in the winter months) the long wall of the Sierra on the far side of the Central Valley, dark at its base, deliciously white all along its crest. We also had the satisfaction of seeing Pine Ridge, Middle Ridge, and Blue Ridge rising up miles to the north and west, reminding us of how far we had ranged from our old haunts, and how big Coe is.

There was another view, though, to the south, that plucked at our sleeve—a deep canyon and a tall wooded ridge, almost as high as Jackson, that lay beyond, and fine green parklands at the canyon-head. But canyon, ridge, and parklands were all outside the boundaries of Coe, and beautiful as they were, we did not linger on them.

Our attitude changed when a version of the park map appeared that gave a name to this forbidden territory—the Redfern Addition, it was—and promised that it would be open to the public in 1995. We talked to volunteers who were going into the area and learned that the deep canyon was called Grizzly Gulch, and that there were waterfalls in it. And we began to speculate about the possibility of a route to Willson Field Hill via the Gulch that would be more direct and would also allow us to avoid grinding up Jackson at the start of the day and jolting down Jackson at the end.

The Grizzly Gulch–Willson Peak Loop

At last, this June, the great day came! The Redfern was open![1] Our first hike fell during the week, so there were no volunteers at the Coyote Creek trailhead to offer guidance. The park map showed a few ranch roads along the northern edge of the Redfern, but it gave no hints about the bottom of Grizzly Gulch or the ridge to the south. We suspected, however, that there would be some kind of roads both in the gulch and on the ridge, and our DeLorme gazetteer for Northern California confirmed our hopes. The volunteer who described the waterfalls to us months earlier had mentioned a path leading up the gulch from the top of the picnic area at the trailhead, so we set off up the hill in search of it. The morning fog, a regular visitor to the Redfern during the summer, was just retreating toward Monterey Bay as we climbed, leaving cool air and a gray sky behind.

We found the trail without difficulty (a helpful brown indicator post has since been erected). At the first fork, a few hundred yards farther along in the coyote bushes, we bore left, wanting to start with the gulch and save the ridge for later in the day.

An old roadbed led us through a lovely stretch of forest (we saw the leaves of a clump of trillium in one spot) to a ford across the creek. There was hardly enough water to wet our boot soles where we crossed, but deep clear pools lay among a jumble of imposing boulders a few yards upstream.

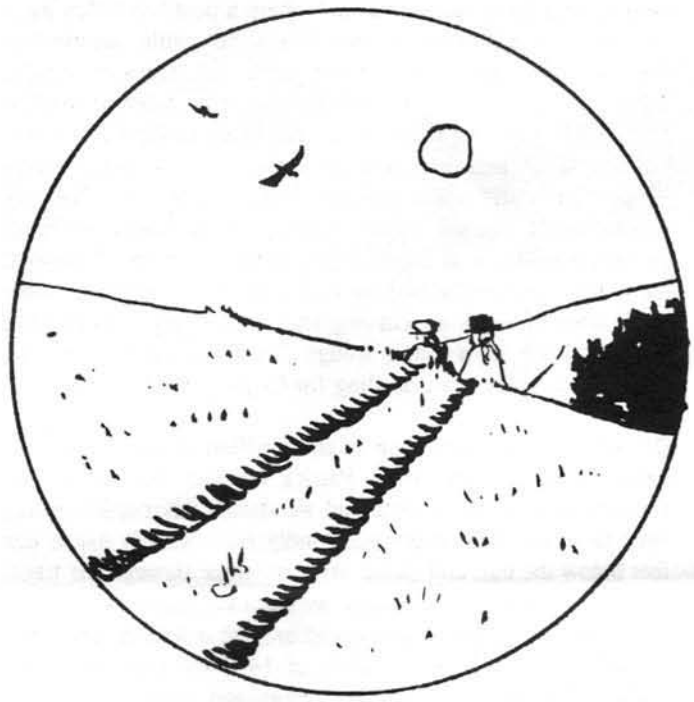
A series of steep ascents led us up through oak woodlands to a road that contoured across the slopes below Jackson Peak. Along the way, we passed through the fence marking the western boundary of the Redfern. At times, the path disappeared in the tall dry grasses that decorated our socks and bootlaces with bearded and bristled seeds, but there was never any doubt about which way we should go.

The road gave us a good view of the gorge-like section of the gulch upstream from the ford and also of the meadows and savannahs even farther upstream that we had admired from the top of Jackson on hikes past. Fine outcrops of rock, rising precipitously on our left, some of them as much as a hundred feet high, punctuated our winding progress eastward. We speculated that the larger of the waterfalls hidden in the trees far below us must lie where the canyon bottom suddenly began to fall away, guarded on either side by the steep slopes with which Coe (and the Redfern) are so well supplied.

After a mile and a half or so, the road dropped into the upper valley, crossing and recrossing the dry stones of the creek. It was a warm, rich place, with large dragonflies, some orange, some black and white, plying the afternoon air above the two large stock ponds on the valley floor. At one point, we glimpsed the tail end of a procession of wild turkeys disappearing into the brush upslope to our right. At another, we roused a band of wild pigs from their naps in a thicket of poison oak. First the three slate-grey sows burst from cover, sprinting up the road ahead of us and then turning to look us over briefly before hurrying on into the woods, and then, after much grunting and crackling and confusion, a half-dozen piglets, their coats still an attractive rust-red, pinwheeled out of the thicket, got their bearings, and scrambled off after their mothers.

The meadows finally ended, and the steepening road led us southward up to a saddle where five ways meet. Ahead of us, we saw more ridges, mostly lower than where we stood, with the peaks around Pacheco pass visible beyond them to the southeast and the Salinas Valley stretching away into the coastal mountains to the south. Behind us, to the north, we could see Wasno Ridge rising up toward Willson Field Hill, where the faint silver trace of a communications mast marked the summit.

Our route lay west, though, along the spine of the tall ridge above Grizzly Gulch—according to our DeLorme, its highest point was called Willson Peak. A cool breeze swept the grasslands as we followed the ranch road up, and the pale grasses glittered in the westering sun. Along the way, we saw a cluster of old trailers and buildings below us on the left, presumably the Willson Ranch headquarters that we had previously seen mentioned in a park flier. Burra Burra Peak came into sight to the northeast, and the great bulk of Mount Stakes far away in the north. From Willson Peak (2,651 feet), we could also see the long, straight stretch of Coyote Creek canyon between China Hole and Grizzly Gulch and, beyond it, the familiar profile of Pine, Middle, and Blue Ridges.



Willson Peak, in fact, may be the best place to appreciate the full size and complexity of Coe. One can see much of the northern edge of the park, and the miles between look long and formidable, whether along the forks of Coyote Creek west of Willow Ridge, or to the east, among the serried folds of the Pacheco drainage and the Orestimba country. The landscape is very beautiful, as much because of the imagination (or recollection) of what is hidden as because of the sight of what is seen. Lending weight to its beauty is the awareness that most of it is protected, public land, a great treasure for the future to which the ridge on which one stands has just been added.

Alas, one must descend from Willson Peak—even the most golden afternoons do not last forever. The delicate white flowers of the evening-blooming wavy-leaf soap plant warn that dusk is near. But in descending, one must take care not to lose one's way. Twenty minutes or so west of the peak, just beyond a steep descent where the road curves to the south, it is time to leave the beaten road for a road that the grass has hidden. The correct path veers away to the right, making for a little swale that leads downward through scattered trees. Un-

less one is looking for it, one will not see it. In fact, on our first hike, we went right past it and had to follow a cattle trail around the head of a large ravine to get back on our route. On a later hike, therefore, we set up a cairn four rocks high where the road leaves the road, for our own guidance and the guidance of others who follow the ridge west, hoping to find their way back to the trailhead and their car.

Nor is this the only check one encounters in descending Willson Ridge. A few slopes, and minutes, farther down, one must cross a fence (there is a spot where a post has fallen partway over—one hopes that only hikers, not cattle, are finding their way through). Beyond the fence, the traces of vehicle tracks disappear. It is possible to proceed straight down the nose of the ridge and pick up the trail again in 10–15 minutes, but the slope gets uncomfortably (though not dangerously) steep. The better choice is to watch for a strong trail that cuts **across** one's natural route, running from south to north through a meadow at the foot of a slope 3–4 minutes beyond the fence. Turn right, and the trail will enter the forest on the north slope of the ridge, curving back to the east and dropping quickly down to a water trough fed by a spring. At the trough, one turns west, heading for Coyote Creek.

But on that inaugural hike in the Redfern in early June, we came down the hard way. Patrick reached the trail a little ahead of Tori; as she arrived and we started talking, something very large and brown erupted loudly from a bush just a few feet below the trail and sailed off downslope through the trees. From the size of the creature, we decided (once we had collected our wits again) that it could only be a wild turkey. And indeed, we discovered a clutch of 14 white eggs under the bush, about the size of goose eggs and much larger than chicken eggs.

The fact that the bird had nested right by the trail confirmed our sense that very few people had been using this path. Indeed we saw more wildlife that day in the Redfern than we had seen on any one day elsewhere in Coe, and the animals we saw seemed more at home there, somehow, and less disturbed by human beings, despite the use of the land for ranching.

Hoping that we had not scared the turkey off its eggs for long, we went on our way. At the fork where we had turned left many hours before, we kept straight on and emerged a few minutes later back at the picnic area, exhilarated by all that we had seen.

Four additional hikes in the Redfern will be described in future issues of The Ponderosa.

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[1] The Redfern is closed to the public from November 1996 through May 1997, as this is the last year that a reduced number of cattle are allowed to graze on the land during the winter months. *Eds.*

Robertkitty

by Winslow Briggs

Although I have frequently had the opportunity to see wildlife in Coe and elsewhere over the years, as often as not I just miss the excitement. I once saw what I identified as **very** fresh lion droppings in Coe (identification not verified) but of course saw no trace of the dropper of the droppings. Likewise once alone just above timberline in Bench Canyon in the Sierra Nevada, I came upon very fresh lion tracks in the wet sand along an unnamed lake. I left the Lake Without a Name rapidly, watching nervously over my right shoulder for any signs of pursuit. On another occasion in Yosemite my wife and I came upon bear tracks in the mud, with water oozing back into the depressions created by the pads as we watched, but there was no bear to be seen. It is a fair bet that the bear could see us, however, and earnestly hoped we would make a mistake with our food.

Or, the wildlife turns out to be completely uninteresting. A tumultuous thrashing around in the dead leaves under the manzanitas turns out to be a the work of an industrious ULGB (unidentifiable little gray bird). A young mountain lion spotted across a ravine in the Point Reyes National Seashore turns out to be a very feral yellow cat.

A few weeks ago, however, it was a different story. I was on patrol a few hundred yards out on the Forest Trail when a bobcat crossed in front of me not more than ten yards away. Normally that would be the end of the story. A flash of fur is all you are allowed to glimpse before the bobcat vanishes without a trace. On this occasion, however, the bobcat climbed up on a downed gray pine trunk, turned back toward me, and sat down. The beautiful black and white markings on his ears were in full view. My camera? Naturally it was relaxing comfortably in Palo Alto. I watched this beautiful animal for two or three minutes and he/she watched me, still at a distance of less than ten yards. He/she then looked first over one shoulder and then the other and flopped down into the typical supine pose of a haughty but contented house cat. The runner-up for the title of "feline terror of the forest" was hardly gaining points in the competition for that title. Two or three minutes later this particular feline lost all credibility in the competition by curling one paw up at a time and giving each consecutively a thorough washing on all sides. The likeness was that of the most domesticated of house cats curled up in somebody's favorite armchair next to a roaring fire. The name Bobcat conjures up the vision of a certain modest level of ferocity. This particular benign-looking and enchanting denizen of the forest hardly qualified for such a miscreant image. The name Robertkitty seemed far more appropriate.

Park News

by Kay S. Robinson
Park Superintendent

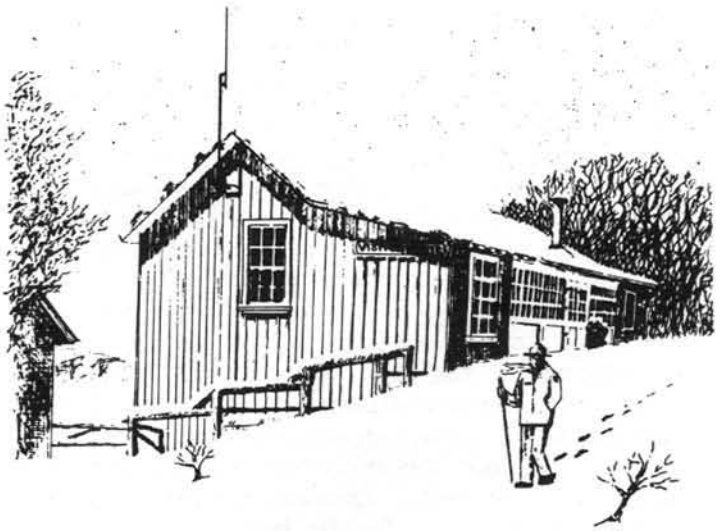
An addition to our park family is the new Four Rivers District Superintendent Joe Hardcastle. His recent park career has taken him from coastal redwoods to Sierra redwoods to, now, the San Joaquin Valley. I hope you will have a chance to meet Joe soon to show him your enthusiasm about Henry Coe SP.

The last few months have been hectic with many old projects being completed or revitalized and new projects surfacing. As mentioned in the May issue, we have applied for a couple of grants. The $220,000 Environmental Enhancement Mitigation Program grant has been approved and will focus on improvements at Bell Station and the first ½ mile of Kaiser-Aetna Road (water system, sanitary facilities, road repair, parking areas). The next phase of this program (as yet unfunded) will tackle development at Dowdy Ranch to prepare for public vehicular access and use on a more frequent basis. A second grant of $10,700 has been awarded for the construction of the realigned Jackson Trail in the southwest part of the park. It is anticipated that work will begin late next summer.

Other facilities development projects that are on-going are the installation of the utilities at the mobile home (courtesy of R & R Construction and maintenance crew Rick Perez and Ric Carpenter), replacement of ramadas at Coe headquarters (courtesy of Dean Meyer), installation of a handicap-accessible pathway to the front door of the visitor center (courtesy of a $3,000 grant; work to be done late spring), construction of the Frog Lake Trail (courtesy of volunteer Everett Allen), continued redevelopment of springs (courtesy of Ruby Domino, the Springs Committee, and the Mule Deer Foundation), and realignment of the west end of Springs Trail (courtesy of Doug Meyers and the Trail Days crew).

Negotiations are continuing with neighbor Don Silacci for the acquisition of a portion of the Hunting Hollow area, off Gilroy Hot Springs Road. This would be a fine acquisition for the future use and enjoyment of the southern portion of Coe Park. Stay tuned for advertisement of a public hearing in February in the Gilroy area.

Thanks to the coffers of the Pine Ridge Association, a mountain lion is currently being taxidermied in Arcata for use in the visitor center. A ledge in the new expansion will accommodate this creature, where he will gaze down on visitors on the lower floor. Until the expansion is a reality, he'll perch on the display cabinet in the middle room of the house museum. The Fundraising Committee is alive, well, and meeting regularly to spur the advancement of the construction. Some ideas we are exploring are grants (as always!), construction as a vocational school project, matching grant drives, and special events in the park. Thanks to you and the general public, we have made progress on our goal for the expansion of the visitor center.



Over-the-Hill Hike

by Larry "Over-the-Hill" Haimowitz

(Saturday, January 25; the 7 a.m. starting time is at Sharry Dunn's request; this hike is specially dedicated to Gary Keller)

Two years ago, three volunteers (who shall remain nameless) decided to celebrate passing the half century mark by trekking over Blue Ridge. In keeping with their extremely generous nature, they invited the rest of us (especially those under 50 who were required to carry the old timers' packs) to join in this lunacy. Over twenty of us showed up at 7 a.m. at park headquarters on a cold, rainy February morning to enjoy a marvelous day of freezing winds, soaking rain, muscle cramps, and exhaustion. Thus we owe this brave trio for creating a wonderful new institution (or maybe we should put them in an institution) for Association members, the Over-the-Hill Hike, and thus they remain nameless to protect them from retribution.

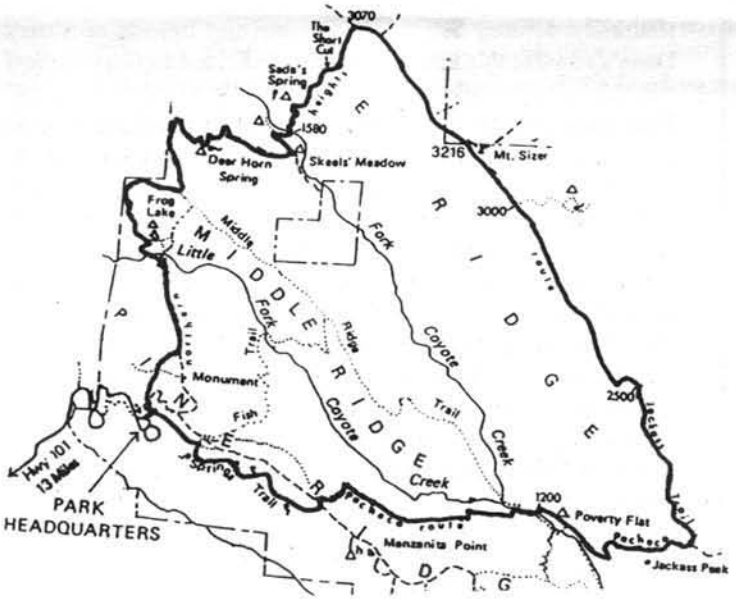
The rules remain the same:

1. If you are under the age of 50, you will be required to carry lunches, water, clothing, lounge chairs, and any other items that the old timers might want to bring along.
2. Everyone bring lunch (and maybe dinner). Those 50 and older might want to bring table cloths, place set-

ting for six, the good silver, bulky, cushy reclining chairs, a magnum of champagne, and the kitchen sink (it is rumored that those under 50 will also be washing dishes). Those under 50 should bring large, mostly empty backpacks (to be filled by the senior citizens in training).

3. No "over the hill" jokes will be tolerated.
4. A good time will be had by all.

The hike takes place rain or shine, unless the creeks are too high to allow a "rescue" vehicle, with our flood date being Sunday, February 9. This is a 14.3-mile hike with about 4,000 feet elevation gain; for comparison, South Rim Grand Canyon to bottom and back is about 15 miles and 5,000 feet. It took about 9 hours last time, which is a pretty leisurely pace; expect the same. Also expect many interesting sights—this is a chance to see what's out there in the company of knowledgeable people like Barry, and many, many of our expert naturalist volunteers. Last time we saw early wildflowers, rainflowers (mushrooms—expect more variety this year, as the rains have been excellent), herds of newts, and unusual invertebrates. Call me (778-6088) or Barry for information or if the park might be flooded. Otherwise, see you at park headquarters at 7 am sharp on Saturday, January 25.



Challenge Grant for Visitor Center Expansion

by Winslow Briggs

Several members of the Pine Ridge Association, calling themselves loosely "Friends of Coe," have recently established a challenge grant to the association to raise money for the expansion of our badly overcrowded visitor center. For each dollar donated and designated as funds to be matched, the Friends of Coe will donate a dollar up to the limit of the challenge grant. If you would like to donate and double the money the Association receives for the visitor center expansion as a result of your generosity, simply indicate that you are donating matching funds. Alternatively, if you would like to join the Friends of Coe and increase the size of the challenge grant, you should get in touch with Barbara Bessey, Chair of the Visitor Center Fund-Raising Committee (415/851-7813).

Coe Backcountry Weekend

Planning is well underway for the fifth annual Coe Backcountry Weekend to be held this spring on April 26–27. Watch for more details in the next issue of *The Ponderosa*, but in the meantime, start planning now for a glorious and busy weekend.

Membership & Contributions

by Lee Dittmann

As fresh green grass sprouts throughout the fields and on hillsides of rain-soaked earth, as the last leaves of deciduous oaks drop and creeks of clear water flow once again—the number of PRA memberships grew to a record high of 364 by December 8th. Thank you all for your support and welcome to the Pine Ridge Association!

Scott Atkinson, Half Moon Bay
Arlene Azzarello, Los Altos Hills
Ron De Falco, San Martin
Clyde Dedmon, San Martin
Tony Ferrari, San Jose
Caree Gellinck, Hollister
Jeff Kallman, Pleasanton
Dale & Elizabeth Kiefling, San Francisco
Philip Kiernan, Campbell
Kristina Kutter & Dan Villarreal, Oakland
Jerome Lamel, San Jose
Mike Meyer, Gilroy
Don Savant, Cupertino
Hans & Donna Smits, Morgan Hill
Rick Thomas, Sunnyvale
Lisa Thornquist, Gilroy

Mike Toney, San Jose
Robin Towse, Aptos
Peter & Janet Walde, San Jose
Barbara Zwieg, Santa Clara

New Contributors to the Visitor Center Expansion Fund

Bonnie Lemons
James C. Riley
Rick Thomas
Ann Watters

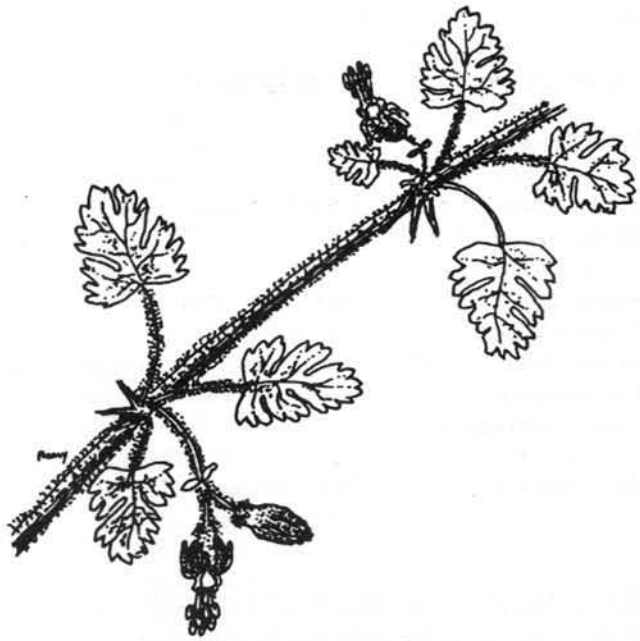
Special Contributions

Thanks to **Cisco Systems** for three generous donations, two of which match the Coe Park volunteer hours of employees **Don Holmes** and **Libby Vincent.**

Membership Renewal Time

If your membership expires at the end of the year, you should have received your membership renewal form in the mail by now. When renewing, if you can afford an extra dollar or two for the Visitor Center Expansion Fund, please contribute! This exciting new facility won't be realized if we depend entirely on "someone else" to fund it.

Thanks to all of our members and contributors for the support you have given us in 1996. Happy holidays and see you at the park in 1997!



PRA Calendar

Saturday, January 25: The third annual **Over-the-Hill Hike.** Join up with a fun-loving crowd of over-50s (and younger) at the visitor center at 7 a.m. to trek a loop over to Blue Ridge and back. Expect a challenging 14.3-mile hike with 4,000 feet elevation gain. See the article on pages 9–10 for more details.

Saturday, February 8: The **Annual Meeting of the Pine Ridge Association.** This year's speaker will be Christine Scott from the California Bat Conservation Association. Note the change in date to the second weekend in February. An announcement and map will be sent out in a separate mailing to the membership.

Saturday & Sunday, March 15 & 16: **Robinson Creek Hike.** This will be an opportunity to explore this beautiful area starting from the eastern side of the park. Additional information will appear in the next issue.

Saturday & Sunday, March 22 & 23: **The Start of the 1997 Interpretive Programs at Coe Park**. There will be hikes offered on Saturdays; evening programs at the visitor center on Saturday evenings; and wildflower walks on Sundays. A flyer listing all of these events will be included in the next issue.

Saturday, April 12: **Trail Day** will be held in Coe Park. Help work on various trails in the park. Bring gloves and sturdy shoes. To receive additional information or to sign up, please call Ranger Doug Meyers at the Sector Office (408/848-4006).

Saturday & Sunday, April 26 & 27: The **Fifth Annual Coe Backcountry Weekend.** A flyer will be distributed later this spring on how to get tickets for this very popular backcountry event.

Sunday, May 11: The annual **Mother's Day Breakfast** at Coe Park. Details on how and when to order tickets will appear in the next issue.

Periodic weekends: Join the San José Astronomical Association members as they view **celestial splendors above Coe Park.** The public is invited to attend. Call the Astronomical Association's events hotline to receive information about upcoming viewings at Coe Park (408/559-1221).

We wish each of you a very Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous New Year!

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The Ponderosa is a periodic publication of the Pine Ridge Association. The PRA's 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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