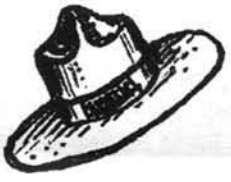
The **Ponderosa**

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

March 1998

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling



The Weasel

Just after a September rainstorm back in 1989, I went for an early evening hike out to the old corral and up to the monument. I avoided the trails and roads and also avoided looking west toward the cities and suburbs of the Santa Clara Valley. The last of the cumulus clouds, pink against the purple sky, were reaching higher and higher as if they were trying to soak up the very last bit of the sun's energy-filled rays. I wandered shirtless, soaking in the cool glow of the false fall dusk. Beauty and wonders surrounded me, and I felt an exhilaration that words can't describe. As I looked east across the vast and varied ridges of the Diablo Range, I thought how incredible it would be to spend a few months out in this beautiful place, day in and day out. What fantastic experiences I'd have. But someone had already done that, someone we called "The Weasel." Not since American Indians lived freely in the Diablo Range has anyone spent so much time so close to the nature of these ridges and valleys.

I know what I experienced as I searched for him, but I can only imagine the remarkable experiences he must have had . . "I know people don't understand me, but this is so much better than living in San Francisco. I wish I didn't have to steal from people, but I've got to eat. I could be out of this rain in a nice warm place like everybody else, but then I'd never know how wonderful this spring storm is. It makes me feel so clean. I don't really want to take other people's food, but I have to.

"Traveling all night last night kept me pretty warm, and now the sun's coming up. I think I'll rest here a while. I guess I wouldn't be so cold if I wasn't so wet. Wow, what a beautiful flower! I wonder what it is. It has five bright red parts with yellow at the bottom. The parts look like elf hats with a bunch of long yellow strings dangling out of them—anthers, I think they're called. Look at the tiny hairs on the flower. A hummingbird! How wonderful! He doesn't even seem to notice me. I wonder how many people have watched a hummingbird feed from only inches away, feeding from a wildflower that matches its beauty. His wings move so fast, I can't even see them. His feathers are so fine and delicate. His tiny eye is filled with life. The red on his head and throat glows

Inside this issue . . .

The story of a horse lost in the park

Plans for the development of Dowdy Ranch

Organized hikes in the backcountry

Calendar of upcoming events

. . . and more!

brighter than neon. There he goes, off like the wind, like a brilliant little spirit. Wow, for just a moment he pulled me away into a timeless eternity."

The Weasel's tracks again. They look about two days old. They must have been made during Tuesday's rainstorm. He lay down here. I wonder why here? It must have been a wet, cold spot. All right! Aquilegia formosa—Crimson Columbine! I forgot how beautiful these flowers are. Sometimes I think I concentrate so much on the details of natural things that I lose the simple enjoyment of just experiencing them. A hummingbird's feeding on the Columbine! What a treat! It's an Anna's Hummingbird, yeah an Anna's. That's the only hummer around here with a red head and throat. Boy, is it bright. I bet he'll come to this flower every day at the same time of day as long as the flower is in bloom. Off he goes, and with such speed. Gone from sight in moments. I wish I could follow him.

"Well, I'm full again, and finally it's warm enough so I can sleep comfortably at night, but the days are too hot to walk very far, and these flies around my ears are so annoying. It's getting hot, must be about noon. At least I've made it to the top of the ridge. There's a good tree to sit under and catch the breeze in the shade. Only a coke to drink and it's so hot. Wow, what a gigantic bird, and it's going to land in the tree right above my head. Maybe if I keep still it won't fly away. It's so big, it must be an eagle! I never knew they were that big. It looks like it could almost carry me off. Its feathers are beautiful. They shine like gold in the sun. Its bright yellow claws are so big, it could wrap them around my arm, and its beak is so large; the hook on the end looks like it could split an elephant's hide. Whoops, I think it sees me. It must see me, how intimidating. It seems to be looking through me, like my third grade teacher used to look at me when I did something wrong. Whoa, there it goes. Only about a minute since it took off, and it's risen so fast it's almost out of sight already. Now it's gliding off to some other ridge to the west. That bird is so free, so strong, in command of everything in its world. I wish I had that strength and freedom in my life."

His tracks again. These look only about a day old. He sat under this tree. At least he wasn't thirsty; he obviously had a coke to drink. I'll take the can back. Maybe we can get fingerprints from it and find out who "The Weasel" is. Wow! A golden eagle! I think it was going to land in the tree until it saw me. I wish I had time to settle down under this tree and have an eagle land close by so I could learn more about it and enjoy its majesty. Eagles always amaze me with their size and strength. They are true masters of all they survey.

"It's getting cool again. Fall can't be far off. It would be nice to be indoors at night. There's a coyote. I've seen lots of coyotes lately, but never one so close. An old timer once told me that the coyote stands for truth. I wonder what he meant. It's going after that skinny squirrel. Oh, good, the squirrel hid in that tall grass. My gosh, the coyote caught it. How could it see the squirrel hiding. I've never liked the idea of animals killing other animals. It seems so cruel.

"What's that? A car? No, it's a motorcycle! I'd better hide in this patch of brush. What's that noise? It's a dog! They're trying to catch me! I'll run down the road. Here's an old side road that hasn't been used for years. Maybe I can make it down that canyon. Oh no, a helicopter! I'll hide under this little tree. They'll never find me . . . ."

They said they've caught him. A dog tracked him down. Let's get over there. We sure were lucky to catch him. Look! That's great! He's wearing those boots. I've been following those boot tracks for months. Hey, what's that going down the road over there? Oh, it's a coyote. And it's got a squirrel in its mouth.

"The Weasel" (also nicknamed the Spam Bandit) apparently started living in the backcountry and breaking into cabins for food back in early March of 1989, and he was caught about six months later on August 30th. The cabins he broke into were spread out in an area of over two hundred square miles in Santa Clara and Stanislaus counties. The Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department, the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department, San Jose Search and Rescue, the California Highway Patrol, and State Parks all participated in the effort to capture him. Searchers were in vehicles, in a helicopter, on foot, on horseback, and on motorcycles, and three tracking dogs were used. After the two motorcycle units found very fresh tracks west of Mississippi Lake, Maury Tripp and one of his bloodhounds followed the scent about a half mile and found the suspect in a brush patch under a low tree.

Three Coe Park volunteers helped find The Weasel. Barbara Bessey and Kevin Gilmartin searched for him during the final week before he was caught and helped to determine the direction he'd taken after he broke into the Arnold Cabin for the

second time. Bill Frazer assisted on the day of the search, looking for tracks, standing by the phone in the museum, and driving searchers out into the park.

We'll probably never know what went through The Weasel's head during the six months he lived in the backcountry of the Diablo Range, but I think we can be sure that he must have had experiences he'll remember for the rest of his life.

Search for a Missing Horse and Rider

by Phyllis Drake

More than 200 Coe volunteer hours were spent on the search for lost rider David Morton of Morgan Hill and his horse Doc. Kay Robinson contacted the Mounted Assistance Unit on Friday, January 2, 1998, and requested volunteers to search for the pair lost in Coe. What a way to begin the new year!

David found his way out of the park on Friday, leaving his completely exhausted horse tied to a tree near a creek. Saturday, January 3, through Wednesday, January 7, Coe volunteers, Search and Rescue people, and David, his family, and friends went back to search for his horse.

Searchers were really worried about the young lost horse, knowing that if he didn't get loose from the tree, he would be severely dehydrated and possibly dead. A thought that was even gloomier arose when a searcher's call was answered by a mountain lion in the Coyote Creek area. This was followed by two big grunts, and they hoped the lion was having pig, not horse, for lunch.

As areas were searched and information was gathered and studied, the search narrowed down to Coyote Creek canyon downstream from China Hole. On Thursday, January 8, Kitty Swindle and Chere Bargar were searching Coyote Creek near Mahoney Crossing. Kitty was up on a bluff above the stream bed, and Chere was following tracks along the creek. She looked up to see Doc looking right back at her. Hallelujah! The horse was still wearing its saddle. They found the bridle in a tree, and saddle packs on the bank.

Kitty and Chere took turns leading the horse and scouting ahead to find a way to get it uphill to the road and Coyote Creek Flats, where they were met by a horse trailer for Doc.

Finding the horse was the biggest reward, but the $500 reward check made out to Pine Ridge Association was great, too. What a way to begin a new year!

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

Park News

by Kay Robinson
Park Superintendent

Last issue I spoke of the development at Bell Station, which is in anticipation of the eventual opening of the east side of the park on a more full-time basis. In late December, I was asked to submit a certain portion of a new budget request for development of Dowdy Ranch. In January, District Superintendent Joseph Hardcastle and I met with DPR staff in Sacramento to review the scope of this new project. It will be a major capital outlay program for development of day use and trailhead parking at the Dowdy.

The scope includes two restrooms and associated septic system, a picnic area, parking for day use vehicles, backpackers, and horse trailers, and renovation of the modulars as a visitor reception building and office/camp host accommodations. This proposal includes only the funds for planning. Those issues that need to be reviewed are the water quality/quantity for adequacy and the cultural and natural resources for environmental impact. This is only the first of many steps to be taken and hurdles to be crossed. If it should become reality, the operation will most likely be seasonal with the gate open to the public during the dry season months.

With the withdrawal of plans to site our east side development as far as the Orestimba Corral, our plans for the Dowdy Ranch may change. At this time, the General Plan of 1985 calls only for day use and operations use (i.e., maintenance yard) at the Dowdy. Camping facilities were not addressed at Dowdy with the implication that a full campground would be included at the Orestimba. Now it is time to rethink that idea. Camping facilities will not be part of this new project, but perhaps in the future we should be considering alternate locations near Dowdy for such a campground. This gives rise to the need for an amendment to the General Plan.

Two other reasons exist for needing an amendment: the expansion of the park by over 12,600 acres since 1985 and the need to revisit the Special Management Zone as identified in the 1985 Plan. In 1985 23,300 acres were identified as State Wilderness, what we know as the Orestimba Wilderness. An

additional 17,500 acres in the heart of the park were designated as State Park but also as Special Management Zone (SMZ). The remaining 27,485 acres (of 68,285 at that time) have been classified as State Park. Reclassification of the SMZ was to be considered by the State Park and Recreation Commission after 10 years, which brings us now to that passage. As per the General Plan "the intent of this zone is to examine the potential of the area for future classification. [The area] will be managed to preserve and restore unimpaired natural values as required for a classification for wilderness or state park."

An essential need at this time is to review all of the existing and potential accesses to Coe and consider future visitor needs. The demographics of the Santa Clara and San Joaquin Valleys indicate that population will, of course, continue to grow. Recreational opportunities and facilities will need to be developed. Our acquisition of Hunting Hollow provides the best opportunity we have ever had at Coe to expand in anticipation of that growth (read that as "flat land!"). Hence, the need to take a new look at our General Plan, to review the resources of the park, to identify those areas of the park where development may take place without jeopardizing the natural features and the cultural resources that make Coe such a special place. Park staff are preparing to address this issue within the next year. Typically a General Plan takes 2 to 4 years to come to fruition; an amendment, less. The first critical element needed is the resource inventory. Luckily, thanks to Lee Sims (for the Redfern) and Larry Haimowitz (for Hunting Hollow) and 45 other volunteers, we are well on our way to compiling those baseline data.

The project of doing the amendment will be very time consuming but is absolutely necessary for the good of the park. There will be opportunities for input, as this is a public review process, and a public hearing will be scheduled. Meanwhile, we have a new area of the park for you to explore, as the first meadow of Hunting Hollow should be open to the public within the next month, depending upon what El Niño has to say! Join us for the Grand Opening on May 2!

Calling All Lazy Ladies

by Toni Sousa

We still have openings for the lazy ladies backpack trip April 11–12. We'll have a full moon, tons of flowers, and terrific catered meals (nominal fee). And if you're new to backpacking, we'll walk you through the steps. We'll meet at headquarters at 11 a.m. and start hiking about noon. This 2.9-mile trip to Manzanita Point is for slightly less lazy ladies than our trip in March but will still be slow and easy. Dinner and breakfast are catered, but bring lunch munchies for Saturday.

To reserve your spot, call Bonnie Lemons at 650/726-7547 or Toni Sousa at 408/778-3692.

The Grizzly Gulch/Willson Peak Walkabout Saturday, May 2

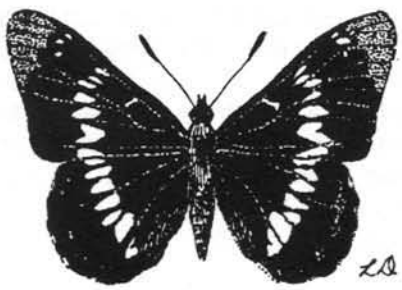
by Mike Meyer

This great views, ever-changing terrained, moderately strenuous, nothing dull about it, 7–9 mile hike in the Redfern follows the forested lower Grizzly Gulch trail, ascends halfway up and then cuts east across Wasno Ridge, crosses upper Grizzly Gulch a few times, cuts off from the road above Tule Pond to Willson Peak (where a festival of sights appear in all directions), then drops down the road and trail back to the Coyote Creek entrance.

The cutoff from the dirt road above Tule Pond isn't on any map except Lee Sims's sketch of Redfern ponds. The one-mile route climbs quickly through oak savanna and mixed woodlands to the top, thus deleting a couple of miles from the old way, which wound around the mountain to Willson Ranch before climbing Steer Ridge to the peak.

Both times I've done this hike, the rewards far outweighed the work. The work isn't bad either because the elevation gains are spread out.

Meet at the Coyote Creek parking area at 7:45 a.m. for an 8 o'clock departure. Bring a lunch and water for all day. See you there!



PRA Calendar

Saturday & Sunday, March 28–29: **Barbed wire fest.** Join in the effort to remove barbed wire from places in the park. This is also a joint outing sponsored by the springs committee. For more information, call Doug Meyers at the sector office (408/848-4006), or call Ruby Domino about the springs cleanup (408/779-4664).

Saturday, April 11: **Trails Day at Coe Park.** Join in the annual effort to work on trails in the park. Bring sturdy shoes, drinking water, and a desire to make a trail! For more information, please call Doug Meyers at the sector office (408/848-4006).

Saturday & Sunday, April 11–12 (rain dates are April 18–19): **Slightly Less Lazy Ladies backpack trip** (2.9 miles to Manzanita Point). See article on page 4 of the newsletter for more information.

Wednesday, April 15: Tickets available for sale for the annual **Mother's Day Breakfast** at Coe. See the enclosed flyer for more information.

Saturday & Sunday, April 25–26: **Coe Backcountry Weekend.** See the enclosed flyer for more details on how to participate in this very popular event.

Saturday, May 2: **Grizzly Gulch/Willson Peak Walkabout**. See article on page 4 for more information.

Saturday, May 2: **Hunting Hollow Grand Opening.** Ribbon cutting and reception will begin at 11 a.m. Guided hikes and rides will take place at noon. From Hwy. 101, take Leavsley Road exit east for 1.8 miles. Turn left at New Avenue and go about 1 mile. Turn right on Roop and pass Coyote Lake County Park. The entrance is 3.3 miles beyond Coyote Lake.

Saturday, June 6: **Poker in the Park.** See enclosed flyer for more information. Workers are needed to prepare and set up for the event. Please call Chere Barger (408/683-2247) or Kitty Swindle (408/842-6215) to sign up.

Visitor Center Expansion Fund

by Lee Dittmann

Thanks to all of the generous donors who are making the visitor center expansion a reality! This list includes the aggregate cash contributions of all of the donors to this special fund, as of March 2, 1998. Not included are the purchase of raffle tickets, prize contributions to the raffles or rummage donations to the garage sales, and membership dues payments or other unrestricted donations to the Pine Ridge Association

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The many anonymous donors contributing in the visitor expansion fund collection boxes at Coe Headquarters and the Coe Sector office (over $1,071 to date!)

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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 at 127 Glenwood Avenue, Woodside, CA 94062; or call 650/851-7813.

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