The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

Autumn 2004

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

Late Summer Love

He never went out to eat until it got dark. In fact, he hadn't seen much of the light of day for almost ten years. But now he had an urge to travel during the day. He took a step out of his abode, and then another step, and then another, and yet another until all eight of his legs were out of his hole. He was a handsome black hairy tarantula who measured four inches across, legs and all, and he set off in a steady determined walk in search of a female to mate with. Before his last molt, you couldn't tell if he was a female or a young male. Now he had the little spurs of a mature male on his front legs.

As he slowly pushed his way through a patch of tall grass, he crossed the path of another male tarantula who was much lighter in color, a medium brown, and a little smaller, only about three and a half inches. These are the normal variations to be expected in size and color of this California species. In other places, such as Mexico, South America, Southern Asia, Africa, and Australia, tarantulas are mostly brown or black, but some have brighter colors. The Red-Kneed Tarantula of Mexico is mostly black but has beautiful yellow, bright red, and orange markings on its legs. The Goliath Bird Eater of South America can be large enough to span a dinner plate. That spider's diet includes vertebrates, even small birds.

Ten years earlier, our tarantula hatched from an egg laid by his mother. She had laid over a hundred eggs on a mat of silky web material and covered the eggs with another layer of web to form an egg sack, which she protected deep in her hole. About six weeks later, he hatched along with all his sisters and brothers. After ten years, he was one of only seven who had survived from that year's litter. Some were eaten by lizards, snakes, birds, or mice, and some died during a severe freeze one winter. Others drowned in their holes one October during an unusually heavy rain.

As a youngster, he burrowed into the ground to make a protective nest. Each winter he would use silk and debris to construct a cover that would keep the rains out. At first his hole was small, but with each molt he enlarged the hole or dug a new one to fit his growing body. When he reached his mature size, he had a hole with an opening about the size of a quarter. He matured in his tenth year, although others matured as early as their seventh year.

He lined his holes with webbing material, which kept the walls of the hole from flaking off and collapsing inward. But, more

Inside this issue . . .

Pros and cons of barbed wire removal

Updates on improvement projects in the park

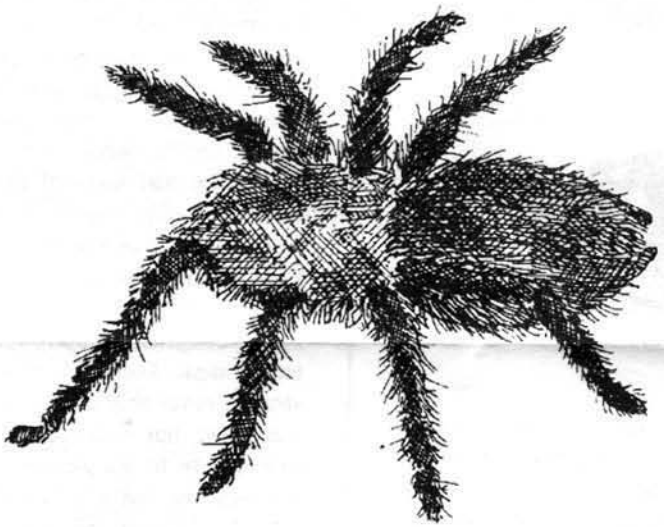
Welcome to a new class of uniformed volunteers

Reminder about PRA Coe Thanksgiving Saturday

. . . and more!

importantly, the webbing provided him with a food-detecting tool. He would sit patiently down in his hole with sensitive feet and sensitive hairy legs touching the sides of his web-lined home, and when a crawling insect came to the edge of his nest and touched the webbing, he knew dinner was at hand. He would rush up to the surface, grab and bite the insect, injecting venom into it, take it back into his hole, spin webbing material around it, and wait for it to die. Once he was fooled. He detected the presence of an insect at his door and ran to the surface only to find the tip of a long grass stem held at the other end by a young human. When he captured the real thing, he would spew digestive juices on the insect and start chewing and sucking on the liquefied edible parts, repeating the process until only the inedible tough parts remained. At times, he would leave his nest during the dead of night and forage nearby.

His venom could kill his tiny prey, but could it harm humans? Human fears have reached their zenith in spider myths. Did you see the movie *Arachnophobia?* Most spiders have venom, but only about 25 out of the 50,000 worldwide species have venom that is capable of harming humans. Spiders seldom bite humans, and in many cases bites said to be "spider bites" are unsubstantiated because the culprit was never seen. Most of these "spider bites" are probably the bites of spider relatives. All spiders, with eight legs, and insects, with six, are arthropods, a group that also includes lobsters and crabs. Spiders are in the class Arachnida, and insects are in the class Insecta, and both classes are in the phylum Arthopoda.



In North America, only two spiders are considered dangerous to people, the Brown Recluse Spider and the Black Widow. Despite rumors to the contrary, Brown Recluse spiders are not found in California; in the United States, they are found only in the south central Midwest. Their bite is not life threatening, but it does cause tissue damage. Their bites are also uncommon, because these spiders are very reclusive and in no way aggressive.

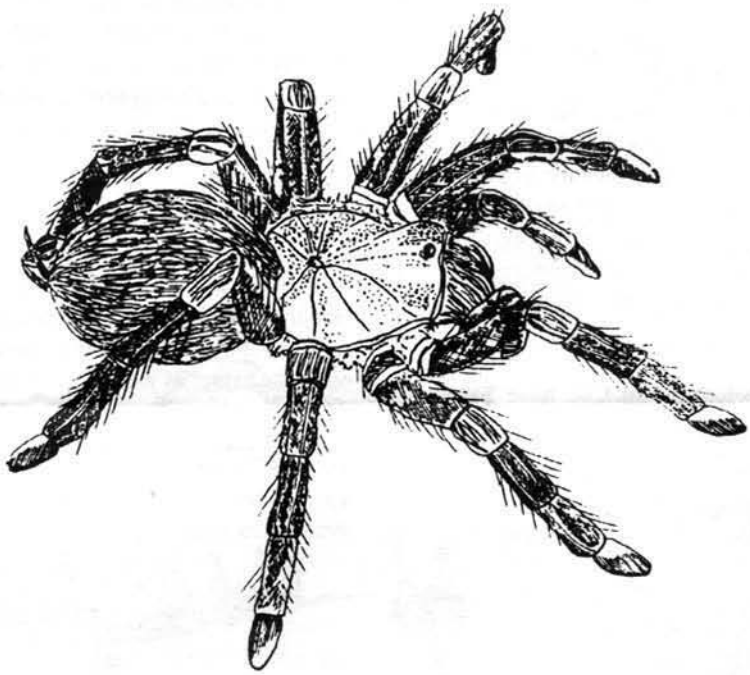
Black Widows are more dangerous. Before modern treatment and antivenin, about five percent of the people bitten by Black Widows died from the bites. Deaths from their bites are now extremely rare. Black Widow venom has a neurotoxin that causes paralysis of muscles, and if muscles that are used in breathing become paralyzed, breathing can stop. People are bitten when they accidentally or on purpose place the Black Widow in a position where it feels threatened, and it tries to defend itself by biting.

Our native tarantulas use a different method of protecting themselves, and even if they're harassed, they seldom bite. Their bites are described as no more painful than a bee sting. The tarantula's venom is relatively weak and has little to no effect on humans. The pain is mostly from the mechanical poke of fangs—like someone sticking two fat pins about a quarter inch or more into your skin. The venom of a very few tarantulas in other parts of the world can be stronger, but there have been no recorded deaths from tarantula bites.

People call our hairy friend a tarantula, but where do you suppose such a strange name comes from? On the inside of the heel of the boot of Italy lies the seaport town of Taranto. In the town, in the 1300s, people were becoming ill, and their illness was thought to be from the bite of the spider that was named after the town, the Tarantula, actually a type of wolf spider that is less than an inch across and only slightly hairy. This malady, called Tarantism, was even said to be passed from one person to another. The only known cure for the illness was to wildly dance while the musicians madly played the Tarantella with their instruments (even Chopin and Liszt later composed Tarantellas). Only in this manner, dancing the Tarantella, could you sweat out the poisons and survive. Wild dances went on every summer for over 300 years before it was determined that the Tarantula was virtually harmless. Most likely the people had been bitten by the European Black Widow. Some historians think that no bites were involved, and that just claiming you'd been bitten provided an excuse for a wild party. As Italians immigrated to other lands, they began to see spiders that were larger and hairier, and they called them Tarantulas. Although our Tarantulas are not closely related to their European namesake, the nickname has stuck and is a little easier to handle than Hairy Mygalomorphs, which is their real name.

He wandered on, the eight tiny eyes on top of his head providing him with poor vision at best. His most important sense was touch. He was constantly using his feet and hairy legs to feel vibrations. A hungry young raccoon caught his slow deliberate movement out of the corner of her eye and went to investigate. As the raccoon put her nose to the tarantula's hind end, the tarantula stopped, stood on his tippy toes, and using his hind legs, started to flick the hairs of his abdomen at the raccoon. She turned and shook her head. The hairs on the tarantula's abdomen had little barbs and were very irritating to her nose, mouth, and eyes. The raccoon wandered away, stopping often to paw at her face.

The tarantula continued on his steady determined walk, crossing a broad stretch of black asphalt. On his left was a flattened tarantula. The driver may have accidentally crushed the spider, not having seen it in time to swerve. Or perhaps the spider's large size and scary looks inspired the driver to run over him intentionally. Few know of the tarantula's value, his important place in the environment, keeping insect populations under control.



As he safely reached the edge of the road, a very large, dark wasp, about two inches long with bright rusty-orange wings, landed on a milkweed plant nearby, and she started to drink the nectar of the flowers. The wasp, called a Tarantula Hawk, didn't see our spider, but she would find another tarantula that afternoon, and when she did, she'd sting it on its underside and wait for the sting to paralyze the spider. The sting would not kill the tarantula but would put it into a state of suspended animation. Sometimes Tarantula Hawks tease a spider out of its hole, sting it, and drag in back into its own hole. If it caught a male out wandering, after her paralyzing sting she would dig a hole and drag the tarantula into it. In either case, she would lay a single egg on its abdomen and bury the paralyzed spider alive. When the egg hatched, the larva would dine on fresh meat. Talk about horror stories!

He had started his wanderings in September. Others of his kind were out as early as mid-August, and they could be out looking for females into early November. He found a hole he sensed was the home of a female, and he touched the silks of her web-lined hole in just the right manner to let her know who he was and what his intentions were. She had just become mature this year at age eight and would continue to mate and produce young until she was over twenty years old. She came out of her hole. The courtship was short, and mating was quick, as he used the little spurs on his front legs to hold down the female's fangs so she couldn't use them on him. After mating, he was off to see if he could find other females. He had stopped eating and drinking and would die in the coming weeks. Other males would die more quickly. Occasionally, females, especially if they were hungry, killed the males and ate them.

On the first Saturday of October, he crossed another asphalt road and walked under a large barbecue with chicken and tri-tip roasts cooking, past busy feet as people washed dishes, around the legs of a table with salad and grilled bread and chili beans. He walked under a picnic table with eight people squeezed onto the seats and luckily walked under the short legs of a seven-year-old boy. He felt the vibrations of the band playing a Tarantella, and moved steadily past children at a table making paper tarantulas. As he approached another table, a gentle hand picked him up and carefully placed him on the shoulder of a young girl. He continued his steady determined walk around the back of her neck and had his picture taken as he emerged on her other shoulder. The gentle hand placed him in the hands of another child, and again he was photographed. Finally he was set back on the ground and continued on his journey never realizing that he had been the guest of honor at a grand festival.

In late October he wandered wearily in his weakened state. High above him were gossamer strands of silk flying from east to west. Aboard each strand was a baby spider, spiderlings of many species, but not of his. These other species of spiders were off to find new places to live and spread their kind. His offspring might not travel as far and certainly not as fast, but they would, after a patient wait of many years, set into a steady determined walk that would be the first steps in renewing his kind.

Pointed Argument

Are barbed-wire fences hazardous or historical?

by Colin Berry

Beyond the jammed freeways and smog that have come to define the flat, suburban sprawl of the Santa Clara Valley, Henry W. Coe State Park, perched at the crest of the Diablo Range, offers a pleasant natural respite. Coe sits less than an hour's drive from both Silicon Valley and metropolitan San Jose, offering rolling hills and canyons, clear air, abundant wildlife, and a paucity of people—though hundreds of square miles for them to walk, hike, or ride mountain bikes. Comprising more than 87,000 acres and growing steadily, Coe remains one of the state's last places to get away from it all, to glimpse golden eagles, ring-tailed cats, or an occasional mountain lion still living in its natural habitat.

Yet for all its attributes, California's second-largest state park also possesses something some of its staff, volunteers, and a segment of the general public *don't* want: nearly 300 miles of barbed-wire fences that crisscross Coe like Frankensteinian surgical scars. Relics of the park's 120-year history as prime cattle ranching land, the fences parallel roads and streambeds, bisect fields, and trace ridgetops; they mark long-forgotten property lines and outline abandoned corrals and pastures. In many places, the fences are the only sign of civilization in these high desert hills.

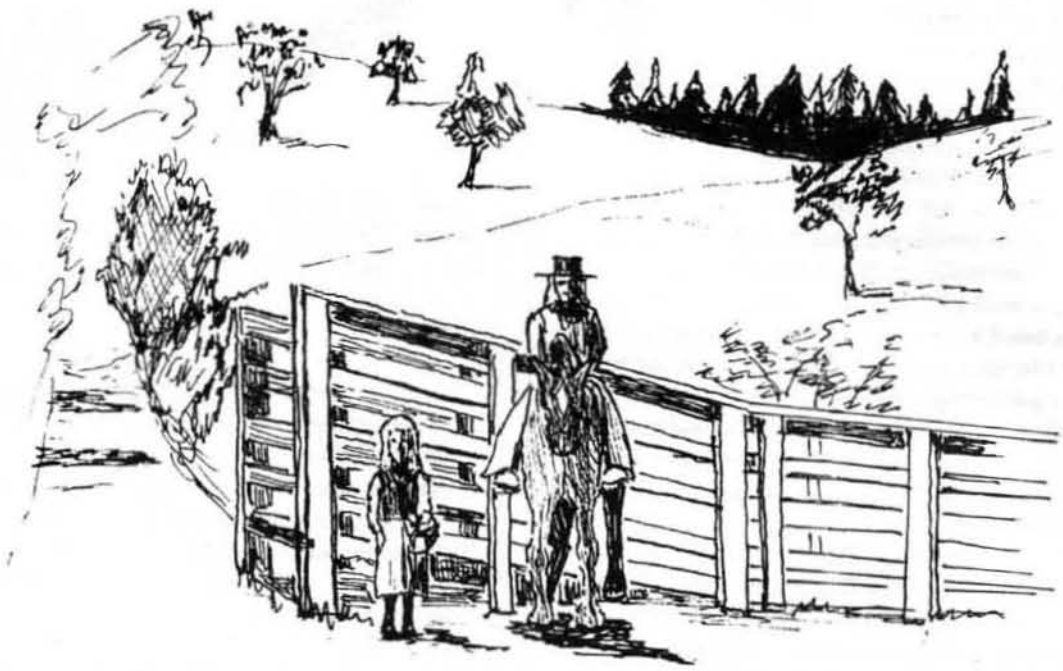
Since the mid-1990s, however, volunteers at Coe have been methodically removing them, an act that puts historians, environmentalists, archeologists, and preservationists of all stripes at odds. Though the materials in question are simple T- and H-shaped posts and strands of rusting wire, arguments on both sides are pointed.

"Some fences lead back to history," says Cameron Bowers, a ranger whose beat is Coe's back country, "but most of the ones we've taken weren't going anywhere." Maneuvering a four-wheel-drive along steep roads in a remote corner of the park, Bowers points out various features of the land, much of it zigzagged with wire. Some fences are more than 100 years old, he explains, though most were strung in the 1940s during the region's ranching heyday.

Bowers cites several reasons for removing the snagged strands. First, he says, it gives everyone better access—humans to explore Coe's rolling open spaces and animals to move unfettered towards water and food. Designated trails here are just suggestions, and hikers are as free as the mule deer and pronghorn antelope to wander; those working to remove the wire say doing so allows for natural movement.

Not everyone agrees. Teddy Goodrich, a volunteer for 24 years and Coe's pro bono anthropologist, categorically opposes removing any fences. "I grew up on a ranch, and I saw how much wildlife made it through the wires," she smiles. For Goodrich, fences are an important reminder that Coe was once cattle country. "And that's important in this part of California," she says, "as ranching moves into history."

Another claim is aesthetic: namely, that Coe's grassy slopes



and undulating ridgelines are more visually pleasing when not bisected with slashes of rusty wire. In a region known for malls and microchips, it's hard to argue that removing remnants of a long-extinct lifestyle isn't a good thing.

But Teddy Goodrich disagrees. "Fences are landmarks, not visual blight," she counters. "We had one homesteader here from the late 1880s until his death in 1939; to me, preserving his fencelines are as important as preserving his house."

Finally, in a huge park like Coe, removing barbed wire provides volunteers a clear, quantifiable objective, one they can achieve quickly. "Pulling wire takes a couple hours' training, and you see immediate rewards," says Rob Glover, a five-year volunteer and chairman of the trails advisory committee. "It gives you a feeling of accomplishment."

Yet Goodrich argues there is more to volunteerism than convenience. "I understand the reasoning, but people need to value the preservation of human history," she says.

Compromises are at hand: each removal request runs a gauntlet of archeological and historical sign-offs; no fence is removed before its coordinates are photographed and mapped using GPS technology. Too, historical elements such as buildings or corrals and their surrounding fencing stand little danger of removal; most of the pulled wire comes from roadsides or trails.

Jeannine Koshear, Coe's resource ecologist, says the long-standing argument that fences mark boundaries between parcels isn't necessarily true. "Fences lie," she says. "All they tell us is that somebody built a fence there. Eventually, we come to the point of needing to either fix them or remove them, because they've become a public nuisance."

"The park is getting big enough to have multiple sections," adds Glover. "Some focus on ranching history, others are used for grazing; Coyote Creek is primarily accessed by bikers looking for a wilderness experience—and wire isn't compatible with that."

"Do I want to remove all the barbed wire in the park?" Bowers says rhetorically, braking for a flock of quail darting across the road. "No. There are areas where it does fit into the landscape, where it adds to the interpretation of cattle ranching history. But if we do it right, it's a definite plus."

Colin Berry (*colinb@sonic.net*) writes for *Print*, NPR's "All Things Considered," KQED-FM, and *Preservation,* from which this article was reprinted by permission. Copyright © 2004 by Colin Berry.

Park News

by Michael Ferry,
Supervising Ranger

The summer season has quickly come and gone. It's time to transition to shorter days and cooler temperatures. This is my favorite time of the year. That word transition gives me a funny feeling these days . . . a word that makes many uneasy, and one that may mean change and fear of the unknown.

It seems that Coe has been in transition for quite some time now, from that district to this, reorganization here, restructure there, reduced budgets (yes, again this year), and do more with less money and time. And yet, it amazes me how Coe just keeps clicking on through these times of transitions. The strength of dedicated volunteers and a few paid staff are the future of Coe.

What's new for Coe?—Lots of changes.

First, I would like to give a warm welcome to our newest members of the Coe volunteer family. These 12 individuals began their training on Sept 11. I look forward to working with all of them in the future. I wish all good luck and welcome to California State Parks and Henry W. Coe State Park.

Good news for the Coe Backcountry Weekend (CBW). C.L. Price and I met with the Monterey District Superintendent, Phil Jenkins. To continue this event another year we must make some changes by reducing the resource impacts (creek crossings) and overhead costs to the state (budget reduction). The CBW committee has been set in motion early and began meeting in September to address these and other issues. Stay tuned for more news on this as it develops. Be prepared to be flexible, as the CBW may have a different look next year. Final recommendations will be submitted to the District Superintendent for approval.

The Dowdy Ranch Day Use Project is underway and in full swing. The buildings are up, and the lots are level. This will bring another change to this area of the park and its operation. When will it be open to the public? What impacts and opportunities will it bring? All too early to address at this time. However, I am excited to be a part of the process and believe it will be a fine addition to Coe. We will be looking for volunteers to help run the Dowdy for extended periods during the dry season. Anyone interested?

The move-in date for the Kickham Ranch office is set for Oct. 18th. We are all excited to finally have our own office space.

We hope to have this open to the public sometime in the future and are in the initial processes of developing a site plan. Once open, please stop by for a visit to this beautiful area.

Our biggest change or transition may still be yet to come with the release of the California Performance Review Report (*http://www.cpr.ca.gov*). This report presents some well needed recommendations and others not so popular. The largest reorganization may still be on the horizon for the Department of Parks and Recreation. We learn most when we are taken out of our comfort zone and forced to adapt. Though fear of this unknown haunts us all, I am convinced that Coe will survive in its long tradition of being the best.

Keep up the good work.

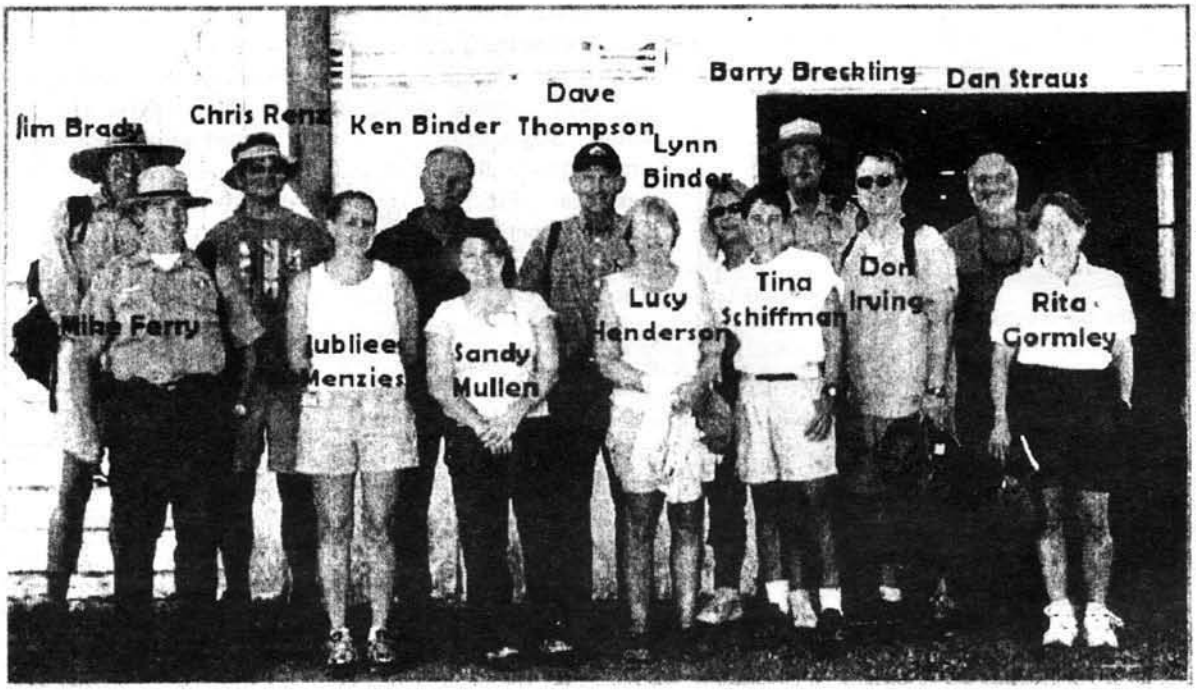
New Volunteer Class

by Barry Breckling

Henry W. Coe State Park's Uniformed Volunteer program has an even dozen new trainees this year, and they have just started their training. This new group will go through about eighty hours of training, covering geology, ecology, plants, animals, knowledge of trails and camps, how to sign up campers and sell books, and a lot more. They will take a first aid course and have the chance to take additional training. The program is administrated by the state, but the volunteers work very closely with the Pine Ridge Association (PRA), which funds the volunteer program. The Uniformed Volunteers provide the labor for PRA events, such as the Mother's Day Breakfast, the TarantulaFest, the 10K Run, and the Backcountry Weekend. Also, when Uniformed Volunteers work in the visitor center, they sell PRA books, shirts, and other items.

This year's group looks like one of the best:

Ken and Lynn Binder will be joining the volunteer program's horse patrol; Lynn has a particular interest in history.
Jim Brady is a hiker and backpacker who wants to get involved in building projects.
Rita Gormley is a neighbor from Findley Ridge. She's involved with search and rescue, is an EMT (emergency medical technician), and teaches First Aid.
Lucy Henderson has a good natural history background from volunteering at Mount Diablo State Park, Sunol Regional Wilderness, and Alexander Lindsay Museum. She's also a Sierra Club hike leader.
Don Irving is an avid Ham and uses his amateur radio skills volunteering for CalStar air ambulance and a local emergency services group. He tells us that all thirteen antennas on his truck actually work.
Jubliee Menzies is a school teacher with lots of interest in natural history.
Sandy Mullen camps and hikes and takes part in other outdoor activities, including dirt bike riding.
Chris Renz is a technical writer by day and camper and backpacker by weekend.
Tina Schiffman is a Sierra Club hike leader who gets involved in protecting park lands.
Dan Straus is a chemistry professor who has hiked and biked through even some of the most remote areas of Coe.



Dave Thompson is a history buff who's volunteered at Gettysburg and is now managing a ranch near the south end of the park.

We wish this group the best as they go through their training. You can meet them this coming February at the PRA/Volunteer Annual Meeting, where you'll see them graduate.

New Members through July

by Jim Wright

We are pleased to welcome the **new members** listed below. Thank you for your support, and welcome to the Pine Ridge Association!

David Glielmi, San Jose
William M. Kirkpatrick, Santa Clara
Craig LaCanto, Campbell
Joan Mancini, San Jose
The Sandy Mullen Family, San Jose
The Mark L. Pieczarka Family, Modesto
Robert Wright, San Jose

We need your help to keep our membership list current and accurate. If you are a paid member, your *Ponderosa* mailing label includes an expiration date. (No expiration date for life members and organizations.) If you have any questions regarding your membership or if you would like to update your address, please contact us.

E-mail: PRA@CoePark.org
Snail mail: 9100 East Dunne Ave., Morgan Hill, CA 95037
Fax: 408/778-5749
Phone: 408/779-2728

Map Sale

by Ann Briggs

The poster maps have been marked down 15%, and PRA members receive an additional 15% discount.

Short and long trails, beautiful vistas, and the unparalleled peace and solitude to be found in the backcountry make Henry W. Coe State Park very special. With cooler fall, green winter, and flower-filled spring approaching, now is the time to decorate your family room with a map that shows the entire park on one side of the paper. Imagine relaxing as you plan your next trip. Whether for one day or one week, you can be assured of well-marked trails and enough distance so that you can hike for a week and never have to use the same trail twice.

Poster maps make great gifts!

PRA Calendar

Saturday, November 6: **Fall Trail Day.** Help maintain the trails at Coe Park. No previous experience necessary. For more information and to sign up, contact Ranger Cameron Bowers (*CBowe@parks.ca.gov*) or call the Coe Park Visitor Center (408/779-2728). The website describes what a typical trail day is like: *http://www.coepark.org/trailwork.html.*

Saturday, November 27: **PRA Coe Thanksgiving Saturday.** Celebrate Thanksgiving Saturday at Coe Park. Bring a dish and drinks to share. Hors d'oeuvres will be served starting around 4 p.m. This is always a fun event, rain or shine. Please call the Coe Park Visitor Center for more information and to sign up (408/779-2728).

Saturday, February 5, 2005: **PRA Annual Meeting.** All PRA members are invited to attend the association's annual meeting and graduation of the new class of uniformed volunteers.

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The Ponderosa is a publication of the Pine Ridge Association with approximately five issues per year. 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 94062-3512; or call 650/851-7813.

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