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

The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

Summer 2004

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

Getting Stew from a Tree

As Bob Dylan sang many years ago, "The times, they are a-changin'." The times are constantly changing, and the more they change, the more I hope our parks remain the same.

When his dad said, "Go get dinner," Bobby knew what to do. He ran to their little white house perched high on a side ridge just below the crest. The house, which was surrounded by a tall white picket fence, was more a cabin than a house, but it was nicer than any of the other homesteaders' cabins in the hills nearby. Bobby opened the front door (the only door, actually) and grabbed his .22, which was propped against the wall just inside the door.

As he huffed and puffed his way up to the top of the ridge, Bobby saw a shadow pass in front of him. He looked up and, although somewhat blinded by the sun, he easily picked out the shape of a red-tailed hawk. As the shadow passed to his left, he heard the familiar shrill warning call of a ground squirrel and saw it quickly dive for its hole, which is what they do when they see a predator in the sky. He'd learned that when ground squirrels spot bobcats or coyotes they sit up, face the predator, give out a loud, evenly spaced series of chirps (about one per second), and then dive for the safety of their burrows, if need be.

He wouldn't wait for the squirrel to reappear. His dad said that ground squirrels weren't good to eat. But some time back, when he was out hunting with his best friend, who lived across the canyon, Bobby had shot a ground squirrel. The boys had built a fire and cooked the squirrel right then and there, and it had tasted pretty good to the two of them.

Last week when he was told to get dinner, he'd taken his dad's .410 shotgun and brought back four nice band-tailed pigeons, one for each member of the family. Bobby ended up getting seconds because his sister ate only a little of hers. Close to where he'd shot the pigeons, he'd seen a big gray squirrel, and that's where he was heading today. He loved squirrel stew, especially the way his mother prepared it.

He crested the ridge and headed down the other side through the pines and black oaks. A brush rabbit ran off into some low bushes. He made a mental note of it. As he approached the Little Fork of the Coyote Creek, he heard the chirping of a gray squirrel. When he reached the flat just above the creek, he could no longer hear the squirrel, so he picked up two rocks and hit them together, making a sound similar to the

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. . . and more!

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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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squirrel's chirp. The squirrel chirped in response, and Bobby spotted its big fluffy tail flitting anxiously. He took careful aim, squeezed the trigger, and shot the squirrel.

In less than half an hour, Bobby had a second squirrel and was heading home. Halfway up the ridge, he stopped in the sparse shade of a large gray pine. Beneath the tree were some freshly fallen cones with pine nuts strewn about. He lingered just long enough to fill one of his pockets. The only thing better than his mom's squirrel stew was her squirrel stew sprinkled with pine nuts.

As he left the shade of the tree, he heard the chirp of another gray squirrel a short ways off. He wouldn't go after it though, because two squirrels would be plenty for their stew. Dad always said that the Good Lord put the plants and animals here on the earth for them to eat, but that they were expected to be responsible stewards of the land. It was their responsibility to take only what they needed.

In fact, his father said the number of people in the country was growing so fast that soon people would just be eating cows, pigs, and chickens, and hardly anyone would be eating the wild game anymore. His father also told him that the government would have to set aside more parks like that Yosemite park in the high mountains, just so people would be able to enjoy nature.

Bobby figured that would be a long way off, for him at least. He could enjoy nature all the way home. Then, after he cracked a bunch of pine nuts, he could dig into his mom's great squirrel stew.

The native squirrels at Coe are the California ground squirrel and the western gray squirrel. Sometime in the 1940s or 50s, eastern fox squirrels were released in western parks, such as San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, and they've slowly spread into other areas. They had moved into the East Bay by the mid-1960s and were first seen at Coe in the early 1980s. They're now well established in the park.

Ground squirrels have continued to be common, but the western gray squirrel has vanished from the ideal habitat in the western part of the park. The last ones seen on the west side were in the mid-1970s, and there's no explanation for their disappearance. Gray squirrels are still seen occasionally in the Orestimba and Pacheco drainages, but those areas contain marginal habitat and have low populations.

The eastern fox squirrel is pale gray with lots of rusty red on its face, legs, underside, and tail. The western gray squirrel is bigger than the fox squirrel and has a very large, fluffy tail. Its fur is uniformly gray but is a lighter gray underneath.

Both the gray and the fox squirrel are tree squirrels. Although they spend much of their time on the ground (especially the gray squirrel), they head straight for a tree when they're frightened. They move easily through the forest canopy where treetops meet, and occasionally they leap across from tree to tree where the branches don't quite meet.

Ground squirrels climb fence posts and small trees, and they sometimes climb up fairly high on larger trees, but they always head for the ground when they're startled.

Both gray squirrels and fox squirrels like pine nuts. They chew away the scales on pine cones to get at the nuts and leave the telltale cores behind. Both squirrels are also enthusiastic acorn eaters.

The round shape of acorns and the effects of gravity take care of the downhill distribution of oak trees. Western gray squirrels and scrub jays take care of the uphill distribution. They bury many acorns for safekeeping, but they can't always remember where they've stashed them all.

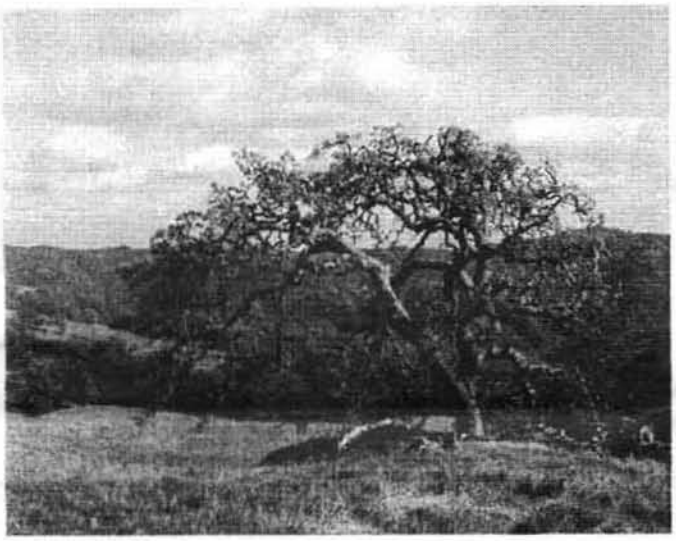
The tracks of tree squirrels, like those of most tree dwelling rodents, show that they put their front feet down parallel to each other when they move from place to place. Ground squirrels, like most ground dwelling rodents, put their front feet down diagonally from each other, with one foot slightly ahead of the other.

The ridges and valleys that make up Coe Park have definitely changed over the years. And, though we might not want to turn the clock back to a time when people shot squirrels for their stew pots, it would be great to be able to see gray squirrels again on the western side of the park.

Rock House Ridge Outing

by Libby Vincent

On March 27 and 28, Pine Ridge Association members and volunteers enjoyed splendid weather for a PRA outing to explore Rock House Ridge. Rock House Ridge is not an easy place to get to because it's a l-o-n-g hike from the visitor center over three ridges, so we were delighted to have a special opportunity to visit the area the "easy" way. Seventeen people set off from the entrance parking lot shortly after 8:00 a.m. Saturday in several four-wheel drive vehicles heading for Arnold Camp, nestled in a fold of hills on the East Fork of Coyote Creek. We were looking forward to camping overnight at Arnold Camp, enjoying a potluck dinner after our excursions up Rock House Ridge, and the next day exploring Little Long Canyon and Water Gulch.



As we bumped and ground our way up Poverty Flat Road on the east side of the Middle Fork of Coyote Creek toward Jackass Peak, we encountered the only sad note on our journey. A young piglet was struggling on the road, dragging its limp hindquarters and squealing loudly in a frantic effort to get out of our way. We learned later from Ken Parrish, a park staffer who had been on the road the previous day, that he'd seen a mountain lion jump a group of piglets, grab one and swipe another in an effort to grab it, damaging or breaking its hindquarters. There's no easy answer to such a sight, so we drove on, hoping that a passing coyote would soon enjoy a good meal.

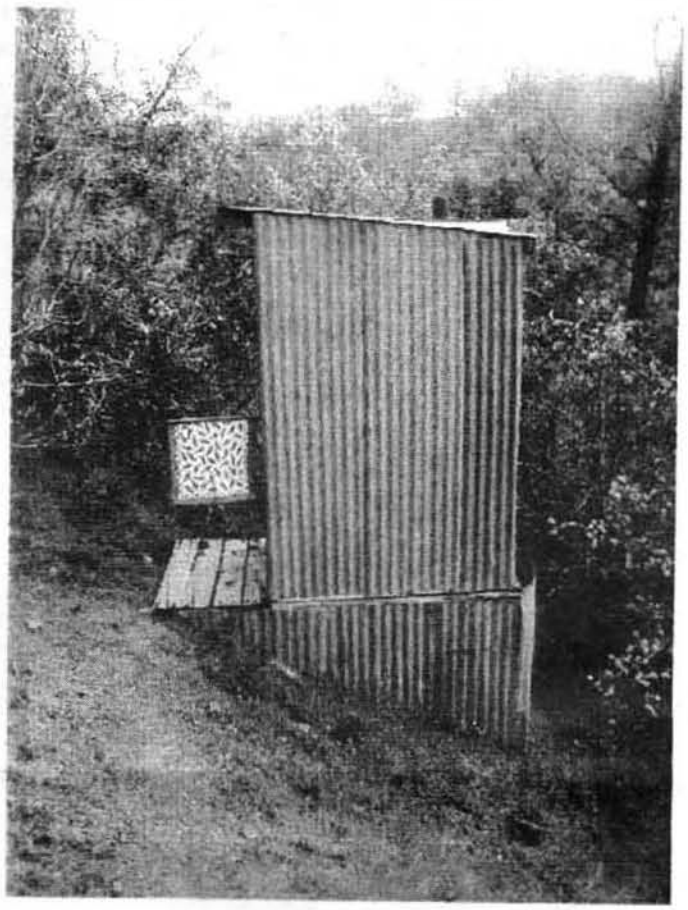
After pitching our tents in the lush grass beside Coyote Creek, we divided into two groups and set off in different directions for Rock House Ridge. One group started south down Coyote Creek on a nine-mile loop that included some steep uphill stretches on the Shafer Corral Trail, Jackass Trail with its glorious array of wildflowers, and Blue Ridge Road. The other group did a five-mile loop that started with a vehicle shuttle from Arnold Camp to Blue Ridge Road then a hike down Black Oak Spring Trail to Rock House Ridge. Wildflowers were pretty much at their peak after the unusually warm, dry spell in the first three weeks of March, the hills were greener than green, the sky bright blue, the sun warm, breezes mild, and views spectacular. It was truly a gorgeous day to be out on the trail.

With some luck, good radio communication, and of course impeccable timing, both groups met up for lunch on a grassy hillside just below Black Oak Spring. From here we enjoyed views of the facing slope of Rock House Ridge, Willow Ridge, Bear Mountain, and points in between. The northeast-facing slope of Blue Ridge is covered with big black oaks and ponderosa pines in the upper reaches and oak woodland and grassland in the lower reaches. The southwest-facing slope of Rock House Ridge is a comparatively gentle slope of rolling grassland dotted with oaks, so it's easy to traverse and a pleasure to explore and enjoy. A creek drains down Rock House Canyon, which divides Blue Ridge and Rock House Ridge.

There are two special features on Rock House Ridge—Hat Rock and the Rock House. Hat Rock is a tall rock outcrop just northwest of the high point, 2,696 feet, of the ridge. It invites those fortunate enough to reach it to scramble to the top and sit (somewhat precariously) and enjoy panoramas of the north end of the park—and an unusual view of Blue Ridge from the "other" side. The Rock House, which is no longer marked on the park map, is what's left of a rock house that was built more than 100 years ago; only some low dry-stone walls abutting a big rock outcrop remain. The story is that when a homesteader was building the house he was scared off by the approach of a grizzly bear and fled, never to return. Can you even dream of grizzlies returning to Coe Park??

After lunch, one group set off to hike along the flank of Rock House Ridge to the Rock House, exploring interesting rock outcrops, identifying flowers and plants, and lingering at still, quiet ponds. The other group scrambled up Rock House Ridge to Hat Rock, then walked down Rock House Ridge Trail toward the East Fork of Coyote Creek. Descending Rock House Ridge is rather like coming in to land in a plane; you have wide panoramas north, east, and south that change from far horizons to intimate detail as you drop about 1,600 feet down to Coyote Creek.

Everyone met up at Arnold Camp to refresh ourselves and prepare dinner. We also enjoyed visiting the outhouse, which has one of the finest views in the park. Privacy was ensured by an appropriately placed red bandana, and occupants enjoyed a marvelous view up a green and grassy hill covered with ceanothus in full bloom perfuming the air, blue oaks higher up, and blue sky beyond. We settled down to enjoy food and libations under the big ramada, which is perfectly placed to provide both shelter and late afternoon sun and warmth. It's astonishing how much fine food turns up at PRA outings, and we enjoyed an array of gourmet offerings. After dinner, some of the group had to head back out of the park, but the rest of us continued to linger, sipping various beverages and solving the problems of the world.



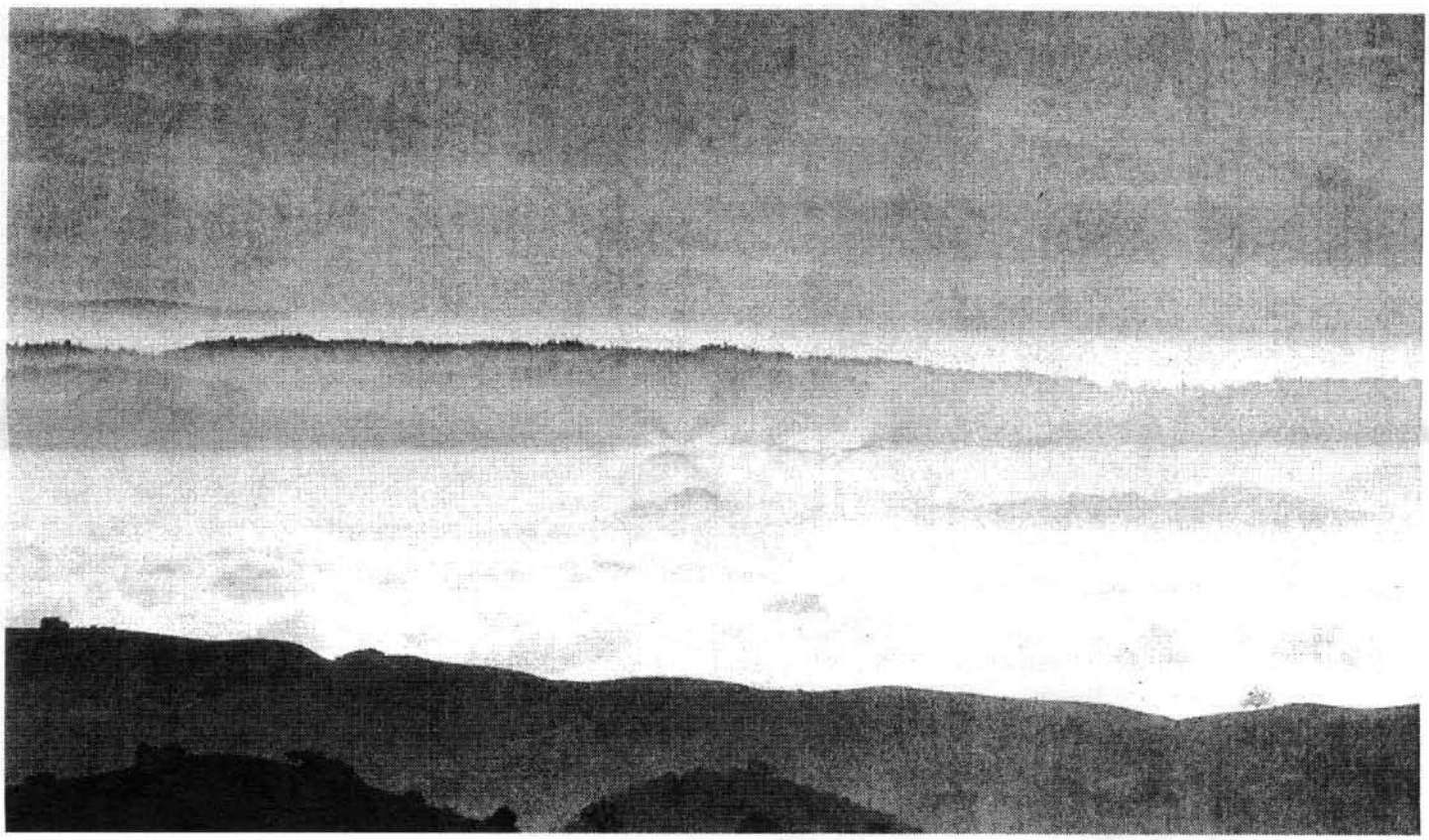
Flag indicating outhouse in use

It was a cold night in the East Fork, some ice on the ground in the early morning hours, but the sun rose high and clear, and the day promised to be warm and sunny. Around 9:30 a.m., we set out on foot up the East Fork toward Little Long Canyon, which is a delightful destination, especially when you don't have to start from the visitor center. A black phoebe had built her nest on the rocks above the long, still pool in a bend in the East Fork just below Little Long Canyon. We walked the road up Little Long Canyon, which was green and grassy and filled with flowers and dappled sunshine, stopping to exclaim over flowers and new views. We climbed to the top of the ridge, then hopped over the gate and dropped down to Water Gulch, where we lingered for lunch by a big rock outcrop just above the creek. Resisting the big temptation to linger and lollygag, we hauled ourselves to our feet and rock-hopped down the creek to the East Fork.

The sun was warm, big pools in Coyote Creek looked irresistible, swimsuits appeared, and we stopped for a dip. What heaven to bask in the warm sun, dabble toes, and splash about in the cool water surrounded by the beauty of green Coe hills in springtime!

After a short walk from the swimming hole back down to Arnold Camp, we packed up our camping gear, loaded vehicles, and headed out.

We stopped as we drove across Miller Field and got out to linger and admire a golden eagle flying high and a pair of white-tailed kites taking turns perching on top of an oak tree down near the creek. Eagle Pines rose high above us to the east, Kelly Cabin Canyon stretched to the south, and the ridges and canyons of Coe Park were about all we could see for miles. We made it back to the entrance parking lot dusty and happy after a wonderful weekend. It had been another fine PRA outing. Come join us for the next one.



Park News

Michael Ferry,
Supervising Ranger

Summer time fun is upon us!

The spring seemed to pass quickly (and warmly) with new projects starting and fantastic special events.

Both the Backcountry Weekend (more on this later) and the Mother's Day Breakfast were a great success in my eyes. Being my first time for each, I was very impressed with the unity and organization of the volunteers and the smiles on peoples faces enjoying these events. It is apparent that these events have been fine-tuned over the years. Fun was had by all!

The Dowdy Ranch day-use project broke ground and is starting to take shape. The project started approximately eight weeks ago with grading and leveling specific user group areas. On the south end there will be a visitor center, small in size, approx 40' x 22', surrounded by tree-shaded picnic sites with bike racks nearby. A restroom and shower building will also be at this location. The sheltered picnic areas will be located on the north end, having a spectacular view looking north over the grand vista of the park. In the center will be the equestrian facility with full commodities of pull through parking spaces, mounting platform, water trough, hitching rails, and manure bin.

The Dowdy will be operated daily with a solar gate entrance and spike tire strip for exit. This area will be closed during the winter. The proposed completion date of the project is approximately a year from now, but that might change due to weather.

The **big** question is: Will the Backcountry Weekend go on next year? This event was planned to sunset once the Dowdy is complete. As of this time I don't have an answer. There are three main issues confronting this question. First, is the completion date for the Dowdy; as of now the project is on schedule. The second issue is the cost of providing access to the Orestimba. The road grading alone (a must for safety) from Bell Station to the Orestimba Corrals cost $10,000, add another $11,000 in operation costs, totals to $21,000 for the weekend. The third issue is resource impact of allowing over 300 vehicles in on the weekend. Once we get a clearer picture on these issues, a decision will be made. I am open to suggestions for mitigating the cost or the resource impact. We thank you for your patience and hope to have a decision by the end of July.

The Kickham Ranch (a.k.a. Stevenson Ranch) is also receiving some attention. The new Coe offices have arrived and are being set up, with move in dates approaching. Randy, Rick, Cameron, Jeannine, and I can't wait to get moved in. The Kickham also hosted two large equestrian events this year. The Quicksilver Endurance ride and the North American Trail Riders Conference ride were big successes. All agreed that the Kickham Ranch has potential as a new staging area for these and other events. The Kickham will be opened to the public at a future date.

You may be seeing some new faces at Coe. The Gavilan sector rangers will be dropping over to the park from time to time to become more familiar and to help out. Introduce yourself and say "Hi" to rangers Brett Reid, Stuart Organo, Andrea Mapes, and our newest addition Sheryl Neufeld (yes, Randy's wife), who just transferred over from Santa Cruz.

I hope all have a safe and happy summer. Keep up the great work!

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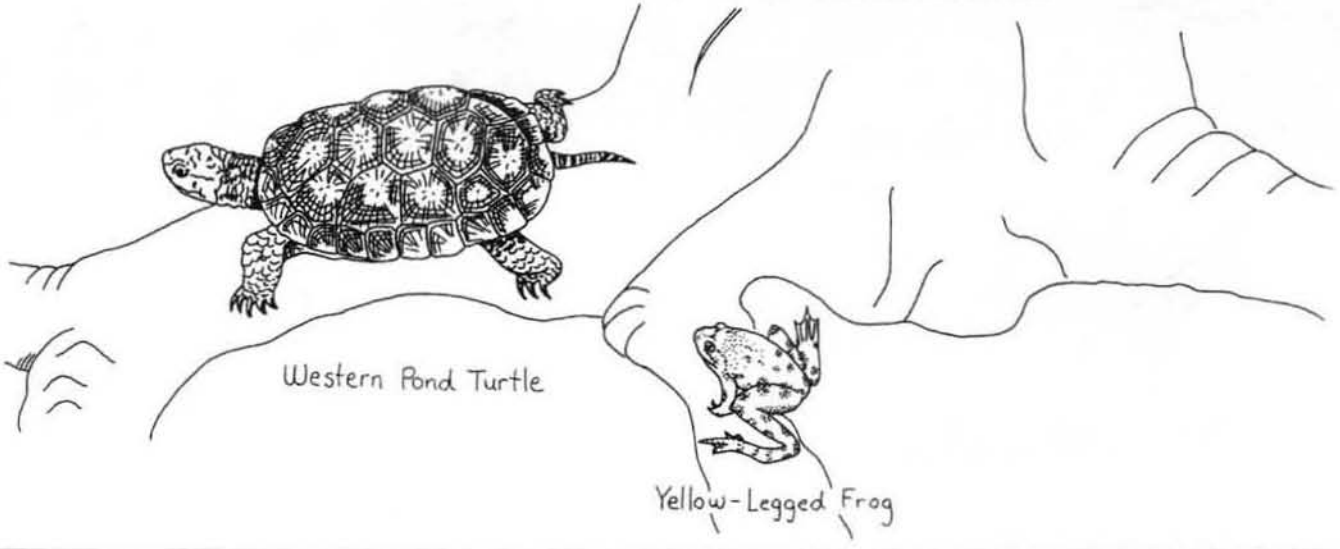

New Members through May

by Margaret Mary McBride

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

Karen Ackland & Larry Korbus, Santa Cruz
Karla Brien & Scott Petersen, Morgan Hill
Jeff & Betsy Chase, Los Gatos
Eva Condon, San Jose
Timothy Fahrni, Woodside
Ron Feltzer, Berkeley
Ron Fischler, Los Altos
Michael Garello, Folsom
Elizabeth Goldmann, Oakland
Neal Gomes, Reno
Rita & John Gormley, Coyote
Betty Lawler, Santa Clara
The Leiser Family, Morgan Hill
Shelly Mandal, Berkeley
Daniel Martinez, San Jose
Stephen McHenry, San Jose
Gerald & Judy Merrill, Oakland
Steen Nielsen, Morgan Hill
John Nides, Berkeley
Lordes Reroma, Morgan Hill
Ralph & Faith Schmidt, San Jose
Barbara Shepard, San Jose
David Speicher, San Jose
Carolyn Straub, San Jose
Reed Thayer, Pebble Beach
David & Margaret Thompson, Gilroy
Joe Thompson, Milpitas
Wendy Worthey, San Diego
Kelley Wright, Morgan Hill
Mark Ziebarth, Morgan Hill

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

An Invitation to Join the Uniformed Volunteer Program

Would you like to learn more about Henry W. Coe State Park—its fascinating history, interesting animals, beautiful wildflowers, singing birds? Would you like to share your knowledge with park visitors? Then consider joining approximately 130 others who donate some of their time to assist Coe Park visitors. Consider becoming a uniformed volunteer.

Uniformed volunteers add to the park visitor's knowledge, interest, enjoyment, and safety by assisting regular park employees through interpretation, operating the visitor center, patrolling the park trails, and carrying out special projects. Uniformed volunteers receive free admission to Coe Park and the other parks in the district and, more importantly, receive the satisfaction derived from doing a job well and providing a necessary service to the public and to the park. In addition, uniformed volunteers find that the initial training and the continuing workshops and classes on topics such as wildflowers, bird identification, tracking, and how to plan an interpretive program are of significant value.

There is a series of classes each fall for all new uniformed volunteers. Topics in the next classes include geology, geography, climate, ecosystems, plants, animals, humans in the park, history of the park, being a volunteer, dealing with the public, interpretive techniques, and first aid. The training will be held at the park on eight weekend days from September 11, 2004, through the beginning of December. Some of the training will occur during hikes and a camp-out in the park. Graduation will be held during the annual meeting of the PRA on February 5, 2005.

Applications are available now. August 14 is the deadline for receipt of applications. Applicants will receive a telephone call to set up a short interview, which will be on August 19, 21, or 22 at park headquarters. If you have any questions or if you would like to obtain an application, call the park at 408/779-2728, or visit our web site at *www.CoePark.org*.

August 28–29: Moonlight-Daylight Hike-Hike

by Bill Gingras

The Moonlight-Daylight Hike-Hike will take place this year on the weekend of August 28th and 29th.

The M-D H-H has been a PRA tradition for many years and takes place in the backcountry of Henry Coe State Park. Attendees of the event can arrive when they want on Saturday, August 28, and spend the afternoon hiking or just relaxing. After dinner, when the sun goes down and the moon rises, we set out on a hike to a peak where we can listen to the night sounds and view what the surrounding landscape looks like under a full moon. You'll be amazed at the dramatic moonlit scene around you and be as equally amazed by the constant symphony that fills the air, courtesy of the Coe nightlife. The following morning, we repeat the hike and observe the differences between the night sounds and scenes and those in the daytime.

A few details are as follows: Plan to arrive on August 28 after 1 p.m. but no later than 8:30 p.m. Camping for this event is recommended. If you plan to camp, bring your own food (dinner, breakfast, and snacks), drinking water, camping gear, and a chair. Charcoal-fired barbecue grills will be available.

You must sign up in order to gain access to the backcountry. The number of participants might be limited, so sign up soon. Call me at 408/227-5424 (home) or via email at BGingras@sbcglobal.net for more information or to sign up, and I will contact you with final details as the weekend draws near.

TFest: Saturday, October 2

by Linda Keahey

It's time to start thinking about the fall Tarantula Fest. The annual barbecue offers a choice of Santa Maria Style Steak, Marinated Chicken, Gardenburgers, or Hot Dogs. Each meal includes beans (vegetarian or regular), grilled bread, salad, and watermelon. New this year, linquica sausage will be available to accompany the steak and chicken selections. Soda, beer, and wine will be available at nominal prices.

The annual raffle to benefit the Visitor Center Expansion Fund promises to have some wonderful prizes. You will soon be receiving more details about the prizes and raffle tickets in a separate mailing.

The day will be jam packed with interesting events. Park volunteers will lead several Tarantula Walks. The Interpretive Center will be open and filled with interesting exhibits and information. Tarantulas, both native and exotic, will be on display. Are you ready for a photo with a tarantula on your head or shoulder? Snakes, children's art activities, and Smokey the Bear are among some of the other interesting options. While you are at the park, take a walk on one of the many beautiful trails.

Again we are fortunate to have the Tarantula Band to entertain us with a lively and fun selection of music.

A form for ordering meal tickets is included in this Ponderosa issue. Don't be disappointed—order early.

Need additional information? Contact me at *jodielindak@aol.com.*

Wanted! TFest Raffle Prizes

by Stew Eastman

Once again we are seeking donations for the Tarantula Fest Raffle that takes place on October 2, 2004. It may seem premature to solicit donations this early, but we have found in the past that some businesses and individuals require three to four months to make the necessary arrangements for their donations. Printing tickets and letters to PRA members containing donor's names also requires about two months of lead-time.

If you plan to make a personal donation or you know of a business that donates to nonprofit organizations like our PRA, please contact me by the first of August.

All contributions to the raffle are tax deductible. Your donation will be advertised in the Visitor Center and on our website during the months of August and September. Donors' names will also be displayed on the raffle tickets and in our mailings to over 500 Pine Ridge Association supporters.

If you can assist us in this year's raffle or would like additional information, please contact Stew Eastman at 408/227-9515 or SWEastman@aol.com.

Coe Park Animal Brochures

You can now order the new animal brochures by mail. The brochures have color photos of the most common animals in the park. One brochure shows 36 birds and 31 reptiles and amphibians. The other one shows 22 mammals, 36 arthropods, and 9 species of fish.

The brochures are sold at the Visitor Center for $3.25 each. The cost is $4 for each brochure if you want to order by mail (the cost includes shipping). Both prices include tax.

To order either or both of the brochures, send a check that is payable to the Pine Ridge Association to the following address: Animal Brochure, 9100 East Dunne Avenue, Morgan Hill, CA 95037. If ordering just one, please indicate which one you wish to purchase.

PRA Calendar

Saturday, August 14: **Deadline to submit applications to become a Uniformed Volunteer.** Please see article on page 7 for more information about the Uniformed Volunteer Program. For information about what a Uniformed Volunteer does, please check out this link on the Coe website: *www.coepark.org/volprogram.html.*

Saturday, August 28 & Sunday, August 29: **Moonlight-Daylight Hike-Hike weekend.** See article on page 8 for more information and to sign up for the weekend.

Saturday, October 2: **Sixth Annual Fall TarantulaFest and Barbecue.** Please see the articles on page 8 for information on this fun-filled day. Check out the photos taken at last year's event that are posted on the Coe website at *http://www.coepark.org/tfest.html* or contact the Coe Park Visitor Center (408/779-2728) for more information.

Saturday, October 16: **Barbed Wire Fest.** Join in the fun of helping to remove barbed wire from the park. Please e-mail Ranger Cameron Bowers (*CBowe@parks.ca.gov*) or call the Coe Park Visitor Center for more information (408/779-2728).

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 contact 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).

Don't forget!
The Saturday evening programs continue through Labor Day weekend.