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

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

I Just Call 'em Lions

Bill had been seeing tracks in the dust of the road as he hung out the window, steering with his right hand and pressing the accelerator just enough with the foot of his outstretched right leg to keep him traveling at about five miles an hour. These tracks, however, were from the day before yesterday, too old to be of much interest to him. All of a sudden he pulled to the left side of the road and stopped. There in the deep dust along the edge of the ridgetop road was a fresh set of tracks. Not over two hours old. He parked his dust-covered, dented, rusty-green Ford pickup at the side of the road, got out, walked over to the tracks, and squatted to get a closer look. Something about the tracks seemed familiar, but he couldn't put his finger on it. After about five minutes, he got up and said quietly, "Huh, a 65- to 70-pound female, about average, and must be about ten years old, no cubs." Bill often talked to himself, but then there was seldom anyone else around to talk to, except for his dogs of course.

He opened the door of the wire cage in the back of the truck and out jumped his five dogs. They ran around the truck with their noses to the ground, knowing it was time to go to work. Bill yelled out, "Over here, Jake," as he pointed to the fresh tracks, and Jake, his oldest and smartest dog, took the cue. With a bark and a wail, the ten-year-old black-and-tan hound headed down the hillside through the oaks and sparse pines with his nose down and his ears flapping. Right behind him was Buck, Jake's four-year old son. Buck's mother was a full-blooded Blue Tick Hound, and Buck was already turning into a good lion dog. The other three, Peaches, Blue Boy, and Wally, were on the other side of the truck, and although they knew the chase was on, it took them several seconds to figure out which way Jake was heading. Bill was always calling those three, "Just a bunch of possum dogs that never could get too excited over lion scent." He knew, however, that it was the group of five dogs that made him one of the best lion hunters in the state. Each dog had its job. For example, Peaches was always at the back of the pack following the trail very carefully. When the other dogs overran the trail or got tricked by a wise old lion, Peaches would come sauntering by, nose to the ground, and put the pack back on the right trail.

Bill stood next to his truck and listened as the barking hounds worked the scent across the face of the ridge. After about twenty minutes, Bill heard the dogs barking louder and more often, and he knew they were getting close to the lion. He grabbed his Winchester Model 70 and headed in the direction

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of the dogs. When he got to within a half mile, the dogs were wailing more intensely but less often, and they were barking almost constantly. He knew the dogs had the lion treed.

He pushed his way through a thicket of ceanothus, poison oak, and coffeeberry bushes and found the dogs at the base of a large black oak tree. There, about twenty-five feet up in the tree, was the lion, looking down, bearing her teeth, and hissing at the dogs. Over the years, Bill had heard lions hiss, growl, and scream, and he'd even heard the little whistles they used to keep in contact with each other.

He walked around the tree looking for the best shot, and just as he lifted his rifle to his shoulder, he noticed the deep V notch in the lion's left ear. He lowered his gun, got all five dogs on leashes, and was just ready to tie them to a tree when the lion jumped to the ground and took off. The dogs broke loose from Bill's hand, and the chase was on again, for all except Wally, who ran around in circles trying to find the trail. Bill grabbed Wally's leash. "Well, they'll have 'er treed soon, Wally. You know those cats can outrun you dogs, but they just don't have much endurance."

He grabbed his rifle and slowly made his way back up the hill, listening to the distant sound of baying hounds, Wally in tow. As he thought about the lion, he smiled, remembering his first encounter with her, the several other times he had run into her, and the numerous times he had seen her tracks over the years. He'd seen her with cubs only once, but there were many times when he'd found little sets of lion tracks following her tracks. When he reached his truck, he threw Wally in the back saying, "I'm gettin' too old for this stuff, you know Wally." Bill reached in through the open driver's door window and honked the horn several times. That would usually bring the dogs back, but he knew the pack was probably too far away to hear, and it would be two or three hours before they returned.

Bill climbed into the cab of the truck and closed the door. Resting his head on the open window, he put his feet up on the dash on the passenger side. He took off his dirty old sweat-soaked ball cap and threw it on the dash on top of an old cigar package, an empty milk carton, and a collection of scribbled notes. The hat landed so Bill could read the words in script across the front. It said "Titleist." Bill had never played golf, but he did know that Titleist was a brand of golf ball. Years earlier when Jake had brought him the hat, it had been brown with white letters, almost new. Now the hat was faded tan with white sweat marks and dirty tan lettering.

Half awake and half asleep, Bill's memories took him back ten years to a canyon several miles to the north. Bill's dogs had gotten too old to chase lions, so he was out on foot. Along with him was his new puppy Jake. Bill had purchased the half-year old pup a few weeks earlier, and this was the first day Bill had taken him on the trail of a lion. Bill was following fresh tracks of a female lion up a familiar side ridge. Jake was interested in the scent, but trailed behind Bill. They entered a small flat, dotted with oaks. Bill looked ahead to a large object at the base of a tree. As he approached, he realized that the object was the carcass of a large deer with the head missing. Bill became very angry. This wasn't the first time he'd seen this sort of thing. He knew exactly what had happened. A poacher had shot the deer and cut off the head for a trophy. Of course he didn't mind people hunting, but this deer was taken out of season and on property that the hunter didn't have permission to be on. And he'd left the meat of the deer to rot. Bill searched the area and found a small hunting camp the poacher had set up. From all indications, the man had left just a few hours earlier.

Jake ignored the deer carcass and wandered, nose down, to the edge of the flat. All of a sudden, Jake started barking in his little puppy voice. Bill looked over at Jake and saw what looked like another dog tied to a tree. As Bill approached, he realized that the small hissing animal tied to the tree was a baby mountain lion. He became infuriated. How could someone leave an animal tied to a tree to die of slow starvation. Bill took off his jacket and threw it over the little lion and then quickly grabbed the bundle. Jake, with his weight on his hindquarters, ready to retreat at a moment's notice, was sniffing at the bundle. Bill carefully unwrapped the package until he could grab the lion by the scruff of the neck. His anger turned to interest and concern as he carefully checked over the lion. Jake bounded around, thinking he might have a new friend to play with.

Bill found a deep, bloody V-shaped notch cut out of the lion's tawny colored left ear. "Let's see," Bill said, talking to the little lion in a very soft voice, "That's quite a cut in your ear. I'd guess some poacher has that stuffed in his pocket as

a souvenir. It'll probably heal up fine, but you'll be taking that notch with you the rest of your life. Let's see, you guys are born with fur, but your eyes stay closed until you're about ten days old, and your eyes are very wide open. Until you're at least a month old, your mom would be feeding you her milk and not giving you any meat, but it looks by how fat you are that you've definitely been eating meat. Let's see. You still have spots, but you wouldn't loose them until you were five or six months old. You look like you're just old enough to start going out with your mom when she's a huntin', so I'd guess you must be about two, maybe three, months old."

Now that the cub was tamed down some, Jake began to search the camp and proudly came back to Bill with a brown baseball cap in his mouth. Bill wrestled the cap away from Jake with one hand and put it on his head. "I'll take that. I'd be wearing my good old San Francisco Giants cap if you hadn't torn it up last week." Bill thought to himself, "I sure would like to meet the man who lost this hat."

Bill picked up his rifle in his left hand, and with the cub in his right, he walked with purpose up the hill, Jake close at his heels. At the base of a rocky bank he came to a dense area of brush. As he approached the brush, he heard a deep, meaningful growl from somewhere just inside the thicket. He carefully put the cub down about twenty feet from the brush, picked up Jake, who was hiding behind his legs peering out towards the brush, and backed away. When he was back about fifty feet, out came the mother lion. She quickly grabbed her cub by the scruff of the neck and disappeared back into the brush.

Bill had known about this lion's den, which was actually just a very thick brush patch. He'd even investigated it one year when he knew the mom was out hunting. He'd seen two baby lions, but the cost of seeing them was being painfully scratched up by the brush and berry vines. The poison oak was as thick as he'd ever seen it, but luckily he didn't get rashes from poison oak.

Even though he was paid by the state to kill lions, and maybe because that was his career, he had developed a great respect for mountain lions. He also believed that if he really wanted to, he could kill all the lions in the range, but then what would he do. As time passed, Bill noticed that he found it harder to shoot lions, although if he knew that a certain lion was eating livestock, he had no problem hunting it down. From time to time he would chase a lion, tree it, and then just watch it for a while. He might let it get away and then follow it for a few days to see what it did. He wanted to learn as much about these beautiful animals as he could.

Bill woke up to the sound of whining dogs. He looked out the window and there was Jake, looking up at him with big eyes and a sad face. Buck, Peaches, and Blue Boy were lying down close by with their long tongues hanging out. Bill gave them water, then loaded them up and drove about five miles south to his camp along a creek in a little open valley.

He built a small fire in the rock ring he'd used off and on over the years. He pulled some Italian sausage from his cooler, cut it up, and threw it in a pot, and then added a can of beans. He put the pot over the coals he'd pulled to the side of the fire ring. When the beans were hot, he spooned them onto his plate and poured some water into the dirty pot. He put his coffee pot on the hot coals and sat back to enjoy his beans with some leftover biscuits. When he was through eating, he lit his kerosene lantern, washed his dishes, and then poured himself a cup of coffee. One cup after dinner always tasted so good, and it actually seemed to help him sleep.

As he sipped his coffee, he began thinking about the years that had gone by so quickly. He was never sorry he'd become a lion hunter, but he felt it was a little like cheating. People were afraid of lions. He knew that lions had attacked people on some rare occasions, but he knew that the only authenticated California lion attack to date was by a lion that had rabies. The two people who'd died from the attack didn't die from their wounds; they died from rabies.

Ranchers would lose an occasional calf or sheep to a lion, but he knew that much of the missing livestock had not been lion

prey. Trying to kill all the lions didn't make sense to him. Lions were, to his way of thinking, the most beautiful animals in the world. And every day he worked, he got to see them or some sign they'd left—a track, a tail swish mark in the dust, sets of scratches on a tree where a lion had sharpened its claws, a scrape a male made with his hind feet and urinated in to show his territory. And he got to spend every working day out in the woods. What better life could he ask for.

Bill pulled out his old beat-up spiral-bound notebook with the tattered blue cover and started going over its familiar pages. He had read every book written about lions, but he'd found a few things he read to be untrue. In his notebook he'd written information from books, what he called "book learnin' notes," and he left room beside them for his own comments. He started reading the first page.

"The animal with the most common names: Cougar, Panther, Painter, Puma, Deer Tiger, Catamount, Mountain Lion." Note: "Once heard people I hunted with in Arizona call them Pumas 'cause it was the Mexican name for them that came from the Aztec language. Everyone I know calls them lions or mountain lions. I just call 'em lions."

"Mountain lions are the most widely distributed mammal in the western hemisphere. British Columbia to the southern tip of South America." Note: "Don't know yet, as I haven't even been out of the United States." (He had chased lions only in California and a bit in western Nevada and parts of Arizona.)

"Can jump 30 feet across the ground and 18 feet vertically." Note: "May be true even though some lion huntin' people are prone to exaggerations. Measured one jump across a road at about 27 feet and saw a young male leap up over 15 feet onto a limb of a big old oak tree."

"Mostly nocturnal." Note: "Certainly not true here. They seem to be out most any time, but I see them out and about mostly in the late afternoon and early mornings. That's when the deer are most active."

"Have 1 to 6 young." Note: "May be true as I've seen moms with 1,2, 3, and 4 young."

"The young stay with their mom for two years." Note: "A number of times I've seen young male lions that were larger than their mom while they were still with her, but best I can tell, they only stay about a year and a half with their moms."

"Catch about one deer every 10 days, and when hunting, they succeed only one out of every three tries." Note: "Seems about right. I don't think some of the young lions catch but one out of about 10 tries."

"Males are 6 feet long plus a 30 to 36 inch tail and weigh 140 to 200 pounds. Females are 90 to 120 pounds." Note: "Seems to be a lot more variation. I've shot a male here in the coast range that was about 150 pounds and that was big for around here. Got one in Arizona that went over 180 pounds, and a friend said he had shot a 215 pound lion in Colorado, and they say the biggest one was 276 pounds. The adult females around here are only about 60 to 90 pounds."

"Eat mostly deer but will take rabbits, raccoons, and squirrels." Note: "Healthy lions seem to take mostly deer, but I've seen the hair of all those things plus coyotes, skunks, and even mice in lion droppings. Even saw porcupine quills in a lion's nose, but don't know if it was able to eat the prickly thing."

Bill had reread only a small part of his notebook, but he was getting sleepy. He put out the fire, climbed into his sleeping bag, and drifted off to sleep.

Two years later Bill was out looking for a large male lion that was reported to have eaten a calf. Bill's friend David, who was the Fish and Game warden for the area, was riding along with Bill. David had heard every lion story Bill had ever told, several more than once. Jake, who was now given permission to ride in the front, was sitting on David's lap with his head out the passenger window sniffing the air as they traveled. Jake, at the ripe old age of 12, still loved to chase lions, but he was now the dog who brought up the rear. Although David had recently described Bill as being as tough as nails, Bill too had slowed down a bit. He would still hike down into a steep canyon if a lion was involved, but now he did it a little slower and with a little limp from a bad knee that he would never let a doctor look at.

They traveled up a gravely creekbed, crossing in and out of the creek as they went. When they rounded a bend, Bill noticed something unusual out of the corner of his eye. He backed his old Ford up and more closely inspected an area up on the bank. There, partially hidden by bushes, was a clearing where someone had been camping. Before Bill stopped the vehicle, Jake was out the window and heading up the hillside. Bill and David got out and listened. Jake was barking as if he were on the trail of a lion. The two men grabbed their rifles, and before they got 20 feet from the truck, they heard Jake barking as if he had treed a lion. The men checked out the campsite and found the body of a large buck hanging from a tree with the cutoff head lying against a rock. They headed quickly up the hill, with Bill limping slightly, and about 200 yards from the creek they found Jake at the base of a tree, barking and growling at a man standing on a limb about ten feet up. As Bill and Dave approached, the man in

the tree called out, "Is that your stupid dog? Call him off. Your crazy dog tried to bite me." Bill grabbed Jake by the collar and then noticed a mountain lion lying dead near the tree. He went over to the lion and squatted down beside it. He could see a bullet hole in the lion's side. He lifted the lion's head and ran his fingers over the deep V notch in the lion's left ear. Jake lay down quietly and rested his head on the lion's back. Tears came to Bill's eyes, and anger swelled in his heart.

The man climbed down from the tree and said to David, "You know, if you give one of those lions a chance, they'll attack you. There's nothing wrong with shooting varmints like that." David asked the man what he knew about the hunting camp and the man replied, "Well . . . , I saw it, but I don't know whose camp it is." David searched the man and took a Buck knife and keys from his pocket. When Bill came over, David silently showed him the man's key ring.

Bill asked the man, "Do you happen to play golf?" The man answered, "Yeah, I play golf, what's it to you?" Bill took off his hat, threw it in the man's face, and said, "I think this belongs to you."

Bill took the key ring from David and removed the trinket that was hanging from it. It was a little triangular-shaped, tawny-colored piece of animal hide. The man said, "I didn't do anything wrong." David replied, "I believe the judge will think otherwise. And, by the way, did you know that mountain lions became a protected species just last month?"

Brown Creeper

Nuttall's Woodpecker

Park News

by Michael Ferry
Supervising Ranger

Rain, rain, and more rain. I am looking out the window, and it is raining again! Boy, Barry's rain dance at last year's Backcountry Weekend sure did work. With all this rain comes lots and lots of wildflowers and park visitors! We went from one of the worst wildflower years to possibly one the best years ever. We will see. The negative side of all this rain is erosion, and our trails and roads are taking a beating. We will have lots of work ahead of us after this winter. Our backcountry patrol travel may also be limited as many of the roads are not suitable for vehicle travel. This matter is complicated further by the fact that we no longer have a road grader, as it was lost last year in an accident off of Wagon Road. We are hearing that help is on its way, with the possibility of a new road grader purchase and an equipment operator position for Coe. Hang on to your hat, this probably will not happen before summer, as these things take some time.

Just when we thought there was no hope for the Coit Road washout, a solution may be near at hand. With excellent work of our dedicated volunteers, an old road was located above the washout through some aerial photographs provided by Bob Patrie. This old road connects into Coit Road both in front and behind the washout section. Several volunteers have walked the road and have said it is a viable option compared with the very expensive option of repairing and filling the washout. The next step will be to begin a project evaluation report and to look at the specifics of grading this new section.

The Dowdy Ranch construction phase is scheduled to begin again April 1 (if it stops raining). The construction phase is scheduled to be finished by July 1. The operation and opening of the Dowdy Ranch to the public is still in the planning phase. We are looking for volunteers who might want to work out at the Dowdy, as we have no funding to staff this facility. We are currently working with the PRA and the Volunteer Committee to address some of these issues.

The new restroom/shower combination building at the Coe campground has yet to break ground, as some of you may have noticed. The construction plans needed to be revised and have just been completed. This project is on the way, and you should see some activity in the next few months.

The Kickham Ranch is continuing its development with a new deck going in around the office. New picnic tables and ramadas will also be installed along with road improvements. The new interpretive panels have arrived from Sacramento and will be installed by the Landmark Volunteers when they come to Coe in July. The Kickham Ranch is open to the public by special arrangements. If anyone is interested in visiting the Kickham Ranch, please contact me. It is my hope to have this area open to the public early next year once we get settled in and can accommodate daily visitors.

I would like to thank the PRA for attending the Annual Park Advocacy Day hosted by the California State Parks Foundation on Monday, March 10, 2005. Ann and Winslow Briggs and myself (on my own time as a PRA member) went to Sacramento for the day to meet our legislators and discuss the importance of our parks. We were joined by nearly 100 other people from all over the California, many representing other cooperating associations and friends of state parks. It was truly a wonderful day to get involved, be heard, and see how the other side of the government works. I urge all of you to take part in this wonderful event and get involved next year. There will be a full report on the details of this day by Ann and Winslow.

Hope to see you out at the Backcountry Weekend April 23–24, as it should be a good one. I hope all of you have a wonderful spring and get out to see nature's grand display of wildflowers.

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Website on Horse-Related Events at Coe Park

For those of you who enjoy riding horses and who would like to know more about horse-back riding at Coe Park, please check out the new website: *http://mysite.verizon.net/bls3/coepark/coehome.html.* There is a calendar of upcoming events, including days when trail work will be done. Also, there is information about the various horse camping areas, complete with pictures. **If you are a uniformed volunteer** and you are interested in carrying out patrols on horseback, the site provides you with the requirements you and your horse need to meet in order to do this. If you would like more information, contact *BonnieStromberg@yahoo.com.*

5K/10K Race and Fun Run
Saturday, June 11, 2005 9:00 a.m.
by Ken Howell

After the Robinson Creek Outing, the Coe Backcountry Weekend, and the Mother's Day Breakfast comes our next fun event, the Henry Coe 5K and 10K race in Hunting Hollow on June 11. It is a lovely place to visit anytime of the year. But in June, while the late flowers give one last hurrah for spring and the full heat of summer hasn't arrived, it is one of the most delightful times to be there.

This event has been expanded this year to include both a 5K race/walk, as well as a 10K race/walk. You can enter either the 5K or the 10K. If you don't want to race, but like to jog on the weekend, come on down and enjoy some camaraderie while jogging with your friends and neighbors. If you are a hiker like myself, who squeezes in some hiking time on the weekend, you can do your weekend hike in beautiful Hunting Hollow. There will be commemorative T-shirts for everyone who participates.

Both the 5K and 10K will be starting together in Hunting Hollow, which is one of the few fairly flat trails in all of Coe State Park. If you have never been in Hunting Hollow, I can tell you that the hills rise majestically on all sides of the Hollow. A small stream runs through the valley with picturesque oak, bay, and sycamore trees growing along the banks of the stream. And with a little rain in April or May, there may be Clarkias, Sticky Monkeyflowers, Mariposa Lilies, and other flowers still blooming.

Registration is available on the *www.coepark.org* web site. There is a link from the first page to a detailed description of the race, a flyer and entry form, and a link to on-line registration. A registration form has also been inserted in this issue of *The Ponderosa.* Register early if you can. An early registration of $25 is available now, which ends June 4. Late registration is $30 and ends the day before the race. Race day registration is $35.

If you don't want to race but want to join in the fun, I still need more volunteers to help with the race. There are plenty of opportunities both before and on race day to assist. If you are interested, please email me at KFHowell@pacbell.net or call me at 408/267-4729.

New Members through February

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!

Roger M. Frates, Morgan Hill
Will Hare, San Jose
Forrest A. Hartman, Berkeley
Lucy Henderson, Orinda
Edward Lennox, Saratoga
Diana Roberts & Chip Curry, San Jose
Steven R. Springsteel, Cupertino

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

Hound's Tongue
Cynoglossum grande
in the Borage family
related to Forget-Me-Not

PRA Calendar

Sunday, May 8: **Mother's Day Breakfast at Coe Park.** This year's breakfast again will be held at the Ridgeview camp site. Tickets for this event will go on sale at the Visitor Center on April 15. A form for ordering tickets will also be posted on our website in early April. The event sells out very quickly, so get your tickets early!

Saturday, June 11: **The Hunting Hollow 10K/5K Run/Walk.** Join us for a day of fun and great exercise! If you haven't had a chance to explore the Hunting Hollow area, this is a great opportunity to do so. See the article on page 6. An application form has been inserted in this issue, or go to our website to obtain an application: *www.coepark.org/hh-10k.html.*

Saturday, August 13: **The deadline for submitting new applications for the Coe Park Uniformed Volunteer Program.** Have you enjoyed going on a walk or hike with one of the Coe Park volunteers? If so, then you might be interested in being a part of the program, so that you can share your knowledge with next year's visitors to the park. It is not too soon to be thinking about joining the program; there is a wonderful series of training sessions. To obtain an application and more information, please visit our website: *http://www.coepark.org/volprogram.html.*

Saturday, October 1: **The Fall TarantulaFest and Barbecue.** Save the date! More information will be provided later. By the way, were you lucky to see some scenes from our 2004 TarantulaFest on Huell Howser's California Golden Parks program in March?

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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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