The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

Autumn 2006

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

Choices and Wishes

Star light, star bright . . . . Well, it didn't really start that way for me. It started with the best of times. Exploring the wild nooks and crannies of the East Bay, learning the names of plants and animals, running free through the woods and fields with an unquenchable thirst to learn more of nature, and most importantly being not quite a teenager. I heard rumors that someday I would have to work, choose a job, pick a career, but my job then was to explore and learn all that there was to learn of wild places.

When I finally accepted, through parent and peer pressure, that there was more to life than play, I pondered what I wanted to "be." It didn't take me long to figure it out. I'd be a ranger, of course! And in a few years, I found myself deciding to go to Humboldt State University. At first I thought I'd study forestry, but pretty quickly I learned that forestry was about cutting down trees. Humboldt State still had some great natural science majors. Botany sounded interesting, for example, but it involved too much chemistry for my tastes. Finally I chose wildlife management. As it turned out, most students in the major intended to get jobs related to hunting, such as working for fish and game departments. I didn't have the same goal, but that was all right. I just wanted to learn more about animals. I chose to take a bunch of botany classes, and that helped to fulfill my wish to learn more about plants.

After college, I got jobs that were somewhat ranger related. I worked at Lafayette Reservoir (my backyard as a kid) and at Alexander Lindsey Junior Museum (I always called it Alexander Lindsey Junior Museum of Natural History and Other Things). Eventually I got a park aid job at Mt. Diablo State Park and even worked as a temporary seasonal ranger for a couple months. I was lucky enough to live in a park residence at Diablo and spent hours after work being a kid again, exploring and learning about the plants, animals, habitats, and all that is wild. During that time I took the California State Park ranger test and got my name on the long list of ranger candidates.

Months had passed and I'd almost forgotten about being on the list when I got the phone call. "Would you like to become a ranger at Monterey District or at Fort Ross?" My wish was going to come true! After a day of thought, I decided on Fort Ross, but when I called back I was told that someone else has chosen Fort Ross, so I was off to the Monterey District. My ranger career started at San Juan Bautista State Historic Park. (Nature-loving, transfer-fearing rangers with National Parks call such places "cannonball parks.") San Juan was a great park, but I'd always dreamed of working in wild places. During my stint at San Juan, I also filled in a day or two a week

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at Fremont Peak State Park. The ranger position I was helping to fill there was vacant, but I was told that the position required someone with experience. After I worked a month at San Juan, all of a sudden I was considered experienced. I moved into the residence at Fremont Peak. I'd made it. I was a ranger at a wildland park.

After about a year, I was transferred to the Seacliff State Beach. A wonderful place to visit, but I didn't want to live there. For six long years, my dearest wish was to get the heck out of there. I was essentially a cop and a dogcatcher. I must have transported over 500 dogs to the pound, and I wrote countless "dog on beach" citations. Calaveras Big Trees State Park was my preferred goal, but any place in the Sierra Nevadas would fulfill my transfer wishes. One day I heard that the ranger at Henry W. Coe State Park was promoting. I hadn't thought of going to that park, but it wasn't the beach, so it had to be OK. Then I realized that Coe was in the range of mountains I loved. The mountain range where I'd grown up. The mountain range of one of my favorite jobs, park aid at Mt. Diablo. This park would be better than OK.

I talked to the district superintendent, and he said, "We'll get you in." On October 31, 1977, my son's seventh birthday, we moved in. On the first of November, I started working as the ranger at Henry W. Coe State Park. There was only one ranger position back then, and the park was a mere 13,000 acres.

It didn't take long to find plenty to do. I started a wish list of things I wanted to see happen, things like building a trail past the springs on the west side of Arnold Field, building a flat trail to Frog Lake (an idea from the ranger before me), putting in a flat trail between the entrance parking lot and the visitor center, getting a full set of interpretive programs going, and seeing more nature-oriented material in the visitor center for the public. After my first spring, getting some kind of additional help was high on my list. West Valley College's park management program had an intern program that we might take advantage of, or we might start our own volunteer program. In 1979 I chose to go with a volunteer program, and in the spring of 1980, we started the program with eight people.

Now, in late 2006, after almost 29 years at Coe, I still have a wish list. Some of the wishes go back to my early years at Coe. One is to convert the "bunkhouse" into a cookhouse similar to what the Coes originally had in front of the old ranch house. Volunteers could use the cookhouse to provide living history for park visitors. Dressed up like the Coes, they would do such things as serve waffles made with an antique waffle iron, using the Coes' old wood-burning stove, which we have. I've always wanted to see a pump put back on the sink a Madrone Soda Springs. Before I got to the park, there was a pump there, and it worked. People who hiked to the springs in the early days of the park reported that the water was interesting. It tasted as if you had stirred in two tablespoons of baking soda, but even earlier reports talked about making lemonade from the water. The mixing of the acidic lemon juice with the alkaline water caused carbon dioxide bubbles to naturally carbonate the drink. And speaking of springs, I've also wanted to put a water tank back up at Blackberry Spring along the Springs Trail. The original tank was standing when I first arrived, but it wasn't holding water. Little remains of the old tank now, a metal ring here, a stave there. We have an old tank of the same size stored at the park. That tank may not be in good enough condition to use, but I'm sure we could find a suitable tank somewhere. With a tank in place, we could interpret the importance of water to cattle ranching.

Other wishes involve trails. Over the years, I've hiked cross country down the backside of Pine Ridge along the park's west boundary and down to the Little Fork of the Coyote Creek near Frog Lake. It's a wonderful area. We've been working on a route for a trail to go through the area, and it wouldn't take much to get the environmental approvals for the trail, which has already been named The Ponderosa Trail. I've worked on a realignment of the Willow Ridge Trail. At present, the trail is very steep, and much of it is exposed. There's a spring near the top of the trail, but it's not always dependable. The reroute, designed to go farther north, is quite shady, has a much better grade, and passes a more dependable spring. Although most of the reroute has been designed and the upper couple hundred yards were completed a few years ago, the biggest and most important portion is waiting to be done. Also, I've wanted to see a trail between Poverty Flat and China Hole. The new maps show such a trail, but it's noted as an "obscure trail." A real trail would be a fine addition to our trail system. It would provide a nice loop for hikers when the creeks are impassable. People could go down to Poverty Flat on the road or the Cougar Trail, go around to China Hole, and then come back up to Headquarters by way of the China Hole Trail.

Another wish is for a trail from Grand Junction (where Forest, Springs, Flat Frog, and Corral trails all meet) to Cordoza Ridge, new property recently added to the west side of the park. The route I've worked on would start off past Lion Spring and would hit Madrone Soda Springs Creek high in its drainage (to keep the elevation loss and gain as little as possible). Then it would follow the canyon down a short distance through a beautiful portion of the creek and head up Cordoza Ridge, taking advantage of a wonderful side canyon. There are several species of plants found along this route that are rarely and sometimes never seen elsewhere in the park, including giant trillium, checker lily, fat and slim Solomon's seals, choke cherries, and Hooker's fairy bells.

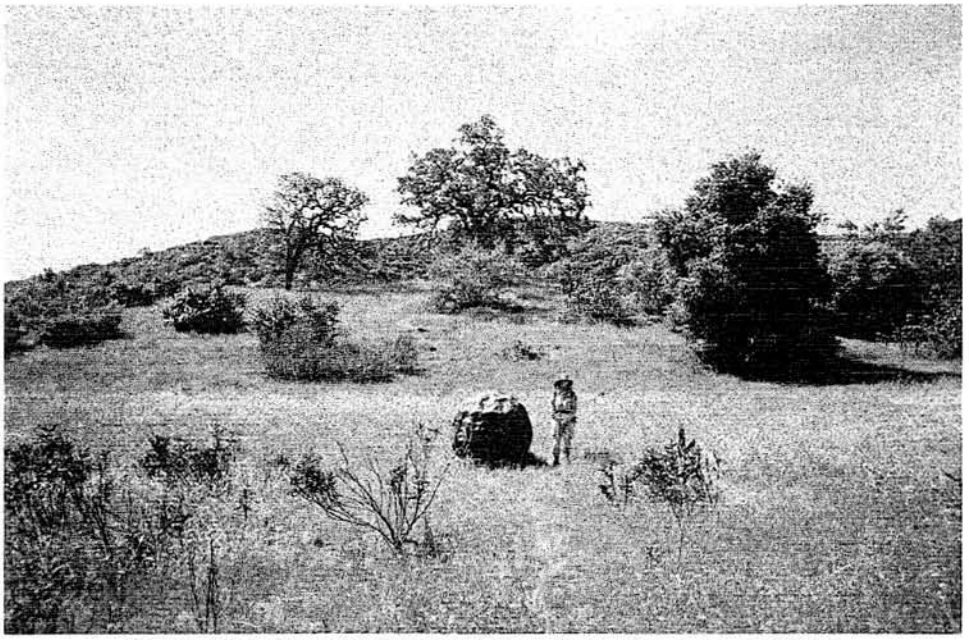
There's much more on my wish list, and the list keeps growing, but there never seems to be enough time to get everything done. Well, I'll wish on. Maybe others will choose to take up and finish some of a ranger's dreams.

Henry Coe vs. The Desais And the Winner Is . . .

by Dinesh Desai

Even as my wife and I were descending a very steep section of Hobbs Road, my mind was not on the task at hand. Instead, I was focused on listening to the turbulent flow of the Middle Fork of Coyote Creek, which we had soon to cross. Earlier, we had crossed the Little Fork of Coyote Creek, but had managed to do so, without taking our boots off, only after spending 15 minutes scouting the best place to cross. Normally, the creek is just what its name implies—a little fork. But, this was not a normal year. Eight inches of snow had fallen at the park headquarters a week earlier, and the month of March would turn out to be one of the wettest on record. Even the little fork was not little.

As we stood looking at the swollen creek, Joy realized that my fears about the safety of crossing it were not totally unfounded. The water was cold, moving swiftly, and appeared to be about three feet deep. We reasoned that, although we could get wet and very cold if we fell in, since there didn't appear to be much danger of drowning, we should cross. We took off our boots, put on our sandals, and proceeded slowly. We are both about the same height, but since Joy has better balance from her years of doing yoga, she went first. I am not a macho guy, and that suited me just fine. Besides, better her be wet and cold than me.



No, the Martians haven't landed. In bygone days, a tractor pulled this giant steel ball alongside the road to remove shrubs.

She moved cautiously, but at one point, she stepped into a big depression, and the water came up about a foot above her right knee. She managed to stay upright, but the digital camera in her pants' pocket bit the dust. That's how things unfolded two hours into the first day of our quest to hike all the trails of Henry Coe.

How It All Began

Every year for the past ten years, I have undertaken some sort of an outdoor adventure. Maybe because I am neither a fast nor a strong athlete, endeavors such as running a marathon or backpacking a long trail like the Pacific Crest Trail do not appeal to me. Besides, a detailed guidebook just about ruins it. I would rather look for untrodden paths to explore. I love the challenge of planning and the thrill of facing, and hopefully conquering, the unknown. Luckily, Joy, too, shares my enthusiasm for such things.

Henry Coe is a large park. At 87,000 acres, it is larger than the combined land area of Palo Alto, Stanford, Mountain View, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Sunnyvale, Cupertino, Campbell, Saratoga, Los Gatos, and Santa Clara. And (I am not making this up) even the information bulletin inside the outhouse at Mississippi Lake proclaims, besides the usual admonitions about not throwing trash into the toilet, that the park is six times as large as the island of Bermuda. In the local hiking/biking community, Henry Coe is often referred to as "Killer Coe," due to its rugged terrain and steep trails. It is also a fact that many trails shown on the map are either nonexistent or extremely difficult to find. And then there are trails that are not shown on the map. In other words, a perfect park for someone looking for an adventure.

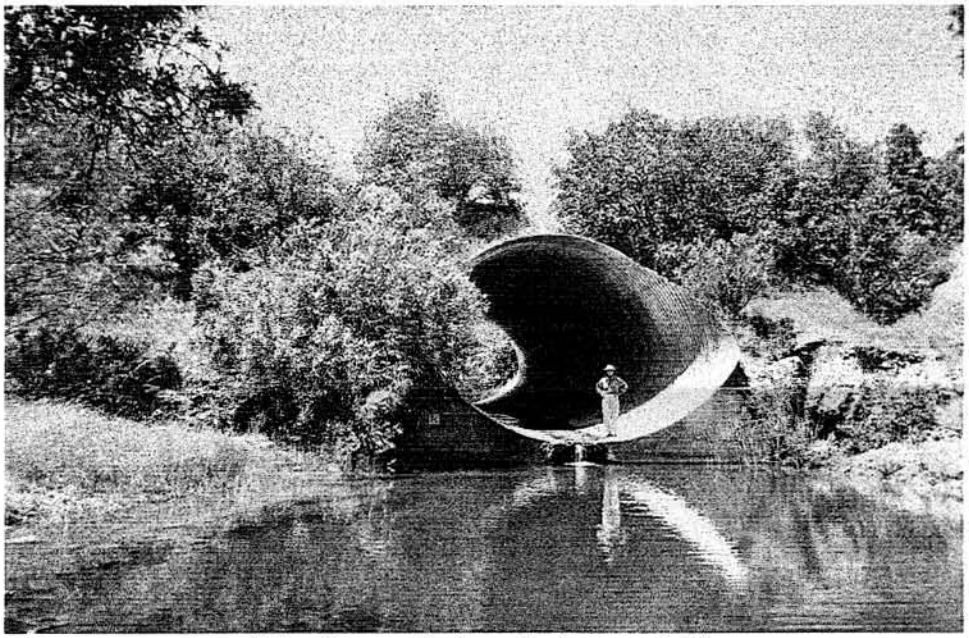
We had originally planned to undertake this venture in the spring of 2004. My preliminary work had convinced me that, in order to hike the trails in the eastern part of the park, a Herculean effort would be required unless we could access the park through the Dowdy gate in the southeast corner. The other three entrances are all on the west side. However, I did not have to deal with the problem, as right around that time, Joy developed a serious foot problem, which required surgery and postponement of our plans. There was a silver lining to this, however. I learned that plans were afoot to open the Dowdy gate on a permanent basis, probably in a year or so. Since it was critical that we be able to use the entrance to enter and leave as necessary, we decided to wait two years and start our venture in the spring of 2006.

The park's web site mentions that there are 250 miles of trails. The total of all the trails shown on the 2002 park map, however, is closer to 350. Since we would have to walk many

trails or their segments more than once, my initial estimate was 500 miles requiring 45 to 50 days. We set aside the three months of spring to accomplish this goal.

After weeks of pouring over the maps, I eventually had a plan of action. I use the word "maps" because, though I mainly used the 2002 park map, I needed the earlier maps to get an overall view of the park's terrain and its major trails. I doubt we would have undertaken this venture but for the amazingly detailed 2002 map. My thanks to the PRA and Bob Patrie and Bill Levey, who spent countless hours (months?) gathering the underlying data.

My plan involved doing four day hikes, each about 14 miles, from each of the four entrances and to cover approximately 40% of the total miles. Next, we would backpack, set up base camps at several interior locations, and day hike three or four trail loops from each such location. I kept the length of these loops at around 11 miles to allow time for housekeeping and finding many rarely used trails.



This culvert on Pacheco Creek can probably handle a flood of Biblical proportion.

The Day Hikes

We were prepared for Henry Coe's challenging terrain, hard-to-find trails, poison oak, and ticks, but, as if that wasn't enough, the heavy rains of early spring this year presented us with the additional challenge of stream crossings and trails blocked by downed trees and limbs. On a 2.3-mile section of the Middle Ridge Trail, we had to step off the trail and go around various obstacles 21 times.

On our first hike from the Hunting Hollow entrance, two of our friends joined us. It took us over an hour to walk the essentially level first three-quarters of a mile of Hunting Hollow road. In that section, a creek meanders across the road, resulting in six crossings. A couple of times, we jumped from rock to rock with varying degree of success. At other times, we avoided the crossings by abandoning the road and instead staying on the same side of the creek. The latter maneuver, unfortunately, required us to climb some slippery slopes through poison oak. It was with a sigh of relief that we left the level road and started up Phegley Ridge Trail.

The trail was quite steep, but the incredible vistas put us in a joyful mood. The surroundings were green as far as we could see, and the light filtering through the trees gave the entire landscape a magical quality. As we crested a rise, Joy spotted a bobcat trying to catch a gopher. It was so intent on catching its prey that it completely ignored us. We just stood there and watched the action. A minute later, it scampered away with its prey.

Later in the day, as we hiked the Bowl Trail, our progress slowed. Yes, we were tired after a long day, but the slow going was mainly due to our stopping every few minutes to remove ticks that were constantly landing on us. I had well over 50 ticks in just a few minutes as I walked through a narrow section lined with chemise. Joy and I were lucky not to have any ticks bore into us, but our friends weren't so fortunate. Later that night, they both found a tick attached to their skin. Luckily, they both had the Pro-Tick Remedy, a tick-removal tool, and were able to safely remove the ticks. Anyone who hikes regularly should probably consider buying this inexpensive tool. Joy and I also wore long pants and long-sleeved shirts, even in 90° weather. We tucked the shirt into our pants and pulled the socks over the pant cuffs. This strategy paid off. In spite of thousands—not an exaggeration—of ticks that landed on us, only one penetrated my skin.

Of the three western entrances, the headquarters is the place to start if one's objective is to hike an easy-to-moderate loop. On the other hand, most hikes from the Hunting Hollow entrance are quite demanding. Our hardest day hike was what I call the Dormida Loop. It is about 16 miles long with an elevation gain of almost 5,000 ft. Though many variations are possible, our route took us up Lyman Willson Ridge Trail past Willson cabin and onto Vasquez Road to Dormida Creek. The display of wildflowers on this loop was nothing but breathtaking. The lightly traveled Vasquez Road had flowers growing on the road itself, and we walked over them with some feeling of guilt. On this road, a ridge line separates, like a continental divide, two watersheds. The creeks to the west flow into Coyote Creek, which empties into the bay. The creeks to the east,

such as Dormida Creek, flow into Pacheco Creek and then into Pajaro River to the ocean. Orestimba Creek, which empties into the Delta via San Joaquin River, constitutes the park's third watershed. The trail near Dormida Creek is quite obscure; one needs to walk in the creek itself for several hundred feet. However, the park map is quite detailed, and a careful look at it should help one find the continuation. Since we had hiked this loop a couple of years ago, finding Vasquez Trail on the other side wasn't a problem, but climbing the 20%–25% grade in the midday sun called for some real effort and a few groaning sounds. Still, unlike most people, I almost always look forward to such steep trails, and Henry Coe provided ample opportunities in the form of Steer Ridge Trail, Mahoney Meadows Road east of Lost Spring Trail, Hobbs Road north of the Middle Fork, and Bear Mountain Road beyond the East Fork, to name just a few. At the other end of the spectrum are a few easy ones, such as Corral, Flat Frog, Springs, and Forest Trails, all near the headquarters.

Our biggest setback came early. I learned that the Dowdy entrance opening was delayed and that it would not open in the spring. In addition, our request for special permission to use that entrance was denied, too. It meant that not only would we not be able to do the four planned day hikes from that entrance, but that my entire backpacking plan was in shambles. If all my years of adventuring had taught me something, it was that obstacles are to be expected and that surmounting them is part and parcel of the game.

Backpacking

We both enjoy hiking and even strenuous mountain climbs, but not backpacking. We are both small in stature, and a 40-lb. pack is just about our limit. Ask us to carry a 50-lb. pack on steep terrain, and you might hear some expletives not usually in our vocabulary. Our planned six- and seven-day backpacking would result in 50- to 60-lb. packs, and I had to come up with an alternative to lugging such heavy packs. After some research and experimentation, I settled on the idea of using a baby jogger. We bought two joggers with 24" rear wheels and removed their canopy, seat, etc., so that only the frames remained. A trial run with a 60-lb. load convinced me that the jogger was indeed a viable alternative.

During the Backcountry Weekend, under my hastily revised plan, we joggerpacked to Mississippi Lake rather than to Paradise Lake in the Orestimba Wilderness. Since we intended to spend six nights at the lake, we had our son drop us off, as we wouldn't have been able to drive out. It was wonderful camping at the lake. After the weekend, we were the only ones there, and the solitude and the vistas gave us an unforgettable experience. The day hikes took a toll, though. The spring rains had stopped, and the daytime highs hovered in the eighties. I had increased our average hike's mileage from 11 to 13 in order to hike as far in the Orestimba Wilderness as we could. In spite of our carrying seven quarts of water between us, on many days we had to replenish our supply from a creek. The warm weather brought out the rattlesnakes, too. One incident had Joy quite rattled. No sooner had she taken ten steps from Pacheco Ridge Road onto the narrow Dog Trail than she encountered a rattler in an attack mode. It had its mouth wide open and was rattling furiously. She hastily retreated only to trip on some tree roots. I hurled some rocks at it, not an easy feat throwing them around a corner, and eventually got it to move a few inches in the bushes. It still was rattling when we hurried past. Later the same day, we saw a huge rattler crossing the trail, but it was quite docile and presented no problems. Regardless, we enjoyed exploring the area, as we had never hiked most of the trails before. We saw several foxes and deer that weren't used to humans. It was a sight to watch big bucks running gracefully at high speeds. Joy is a naturalist and found interesting new flora and fauna. She observed that, surprisingly, there were no critters near our campsite looking for food—no squirrels, ants, or birds.

We left our tent, joggers, etc. at the lake and hiked out to the headquarters entrance with dirty clothes and garbage in our day packs. A couple of days later, we were back at the headquarters with a friend in tow. I had recruited him to carry our seven-day food supply, about 18 lbs., to Mississippi Lake and return to his car the same day. He made the round trip, 24 miles with a 5,000-foot climb, with a big pack on his back and a smile on his face. Yes, my friends are masochists, too. Actually, I don't know whether he was still smiling at 9 p.m. when he returned to his car. From the lake, we moved to Pacheco Camp, four nights, and then to Blue Tank Spring, three nights. The latter isn't a good camping location, but it was centrally located for the hikes we had planned to do. The toughest and the most time consuming hikes were the ones along the creeks. Because of the high water level, the best way wasn't always readily apparent. And there were plenty of fallen limbs waiting to break our limbs. We were running late one day and were forced to skip the 1.6-mile Kelly Cabin Canyon Trail. A couple of weeks later, we did a 15-mile loop from the Coyote Creek entrance just to hike that missed 1.6 miles. And yes, we did temporarily get lost on a few occasions, but by using the park map and my GPS receiver, we got back on track. Our last joggerpacking was for four days to Los Cruzeros, and with that, our completed mileage climbed to just under 400.

The End

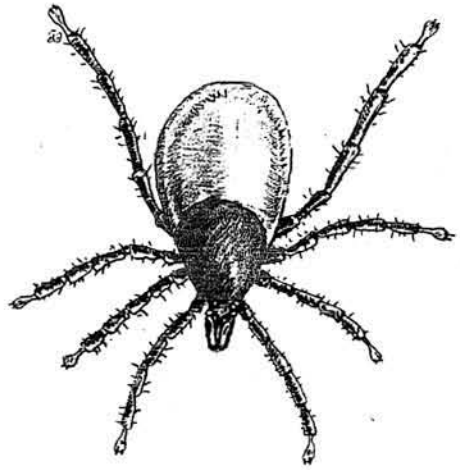
Several times during our hikes, we chanced upon rangers Barry Breckling and Cameron Bowers. Initially, they might have been skeptical about our commitment and ability—and with good reason. Over the weeks, however, I could sense that they were really warming up to us. I discussed our predicament at not being able to use the Dowdy Entrance and asked Cameron if he could ask Supervising Ranger Michael Ferry to reconsider our original request. I was pleasantly surprised when he informed me that Mike Ferry had left it up to him and that he would allow us to use that entrance. I said "pleasantly surprised" because, as everyone knows, the struc-

ture of government entities and large corporations inhibits its employees from going out of their way to solve someone else's problems.

We car camped at Pacheco Creek and hiked 67 more miles to bring our total to 457. More interestingly, it brought our total elevation gain close to 100,000 ft.! This means that unless you are hiking a few of the easy trails, on the average, expect a climb of at least 2,000 ft. on any 10-mile hike in this park. No wonder it is nicknamed "Killer Coe." Our last hike from Pacheco Creek, a 20-miler, took us all the way to Red Creek Road in the Orestimba Wilderness. With that, we had finished hiking all the trails in the park except about 50 miles north of Red Creek Road. Because of the remoteness of the area, a ten-day backpack was called for to hike the 50 miles.

It was already the second week of June, and the mercury was rising by the day. Still, we could handle the heat with adequate water. Some years ago, Joy and I walked the 180-mile length of Death Valley in the daytime in July and survived to tell the tale, but only by consuming 3+ gallons of water each day. Robison Creek, which usually dries up by mid-May, might still have had some pools of water, but bushwhacking many seldom used and steep trails in the heat would have required a lot of effort and, consequently, a lot of water. Unfortunately, there aren't too many reliable water sources along many of the trails. My experience on the day hikes from Mississippi Lake had me convinced that replenishing our water would definitely be required. I am an adventurer, but not a maniac. The odds of successfully completing the backpack were against us. It wasn't an easy decision, but in the end sanity prevailed, and we decided to be satisfied with what we had accomplished.

(Editors' note: You can read about Dinesh's Death Valley and other adventures on his web site "The Long Journeys of Dinesh Desai." Go to *http://ladesai.home.att.net* or type "Dinesh Desai" in Google.)



Walking the Walsh Trail

by Ranger John Verhoeven

Have you ever wondered what a place or trail looks like on a map? When I was a child, I used to look at maps all the time, dreaming of what it might be like to climb Mount Everest, or raft through the Grand Canyon and stop near that waterfall that has no name, or camp on a sand bar deep in the canyon. So many thoughts come into my mind, what plants and animals I might find there, what the view might be like, or who was the last person to have been there.

Recently I had the chance to explore such a place in Coe Park that is nestled in a valley southeast of Pacheco Ridge. I was contacted by a Coe Park volunteer, Libby Vincent, about hiking on the Walsh Trail that connects Center Flats Trail and Pacheco Ridge Trail. Libby was scouting out Walsh Trail as part of a longer hike to Pacheco Falls that she was leading for the Sierra Club on May 20. Neither Libby nor I had ever hiked on the Walsh Trail and were both excited about exploring an area of the park neither of us had been to.

The day was a breezy warm spring day. The grassy hillsides were just beginning to become gilded. Chinese houses layered the shady northeast facing slopes. Indian paintbrushes painted in the wind, showing the invisible gusts. Golden eagles and red-tail hawks floated on the updrafts in the far distance looking over from Center Flats Ridge to the south.

From Center Flats Road the trail sign confidently declares, Walsh Trail, but looking down the slope among the airy oak trees, you could hardly see the trail. Grasses had nearly obscured the faint line that led downwards. After we had moved around a few downed trees and ducked under and around branches of poison oak, the trail would occasionally reveal itself as an old road cut at a switchback. As Libby and I descended toward the valley where Pacheco Creek flows, we were treated with grand views to the north of Walsh Peak and Pacheco Ridge. Wildflowers appeared to us in patches, sometimes Indian paintbrush, or Ithuriel's spears, and occasional California gilia flowers.

The hike down was enjoyable. The cakewalk was about to end, but not without enjoying Pacheco Creek and Walsh Cabin first. The creek has a soft flow to it, with a refreshing coolness to the touch. There are small swaths of long, green mosses snagged on roots and branches in the water that glide with the current. Looking around you could see why someone would build a cabin in such a place. Time was on a slower pace here, measured by the languid flow at our feet.

Walsh cabin is a simply designed corrugated metal one-room structure with a nice wooden floor and a few four-pane sliding wooden windows. There are two rusty spring bed frames still there, inviting the imagination to picture young kids coming out with their parents to the cabin to explore the creek and hike in the woods, or a couple buddies fishing in the creek.

About 20 yards away from this cabin are the remains of another structure made of similar materials, though completely collapsed.

After an enjoyable ten-minute rest, the hard part of the hike was upon us—find and hike the rest of the Walsh Trail up to Pacheco Ridge, almost 1,000-foot elevation gain in less than a mile. Looking across the creek from just north of the cabin, there appeared to be a faint trail leading diagonally up the hill. We scrambled up the steep slope and entered into the small line of oak trees and chaparral. After a few more lines of trees, the trail led to a sloped meadow about 100 yards wide. All edges of the meadow seemed like a wall of vegetation, no clear path to follow.

We chose to continue across the meadow in a southeasterly direction in the hopes that the next ridge would reveal the trail. At the next ridge, we turned to go uphill, looking for a way through another line of trees. After scaling one-third of the way up toward Pacheco Ridge, we realized that we were probably far from the trail, even though from the other side of the valley, you could see the trail zigzagging up a ridge line on the slope. Libby and I decided to turn downhill and head back to the creek.

As we scampered downhill, Libby and I had to use all our senses and balance to avoid a fall—the slope was very, very steep. Every few steps, I could see small rocks tumbling down a few hundred feet to the creek below. We carefully switched back and forth leaning into the hill or sliding on our behinds to keep from sliding out of control down the hill. It was exhilarating to maintain footing on such a steep slope.

At the creek we congratulated each other on a job well done on the downhill but were still confounded about where we went wrong. Once again on the hike back up to Center Flats Road, we could see the elusive Walsh Trail leading up to Pacheco Ridge. Hiking Walsh Trail had finalized Libby's plan for the Sierra Club hike route, which was our main objective of the hike.

On May 20 I joined Libby and the Sierra Club group on the hike she had planned to explore Pacheco Falls. The hike was strenuous but was well worth the effort. Pacheco Falls is a spectacular cascading-style waterfall with an excellent swimming hole at the bottom of the falls. The falls are in a deep ravine of rock that forms a twisting U-shape. There is a nice viewpoint above the falls where you can look down at the several pools of water between waterfalls that follow the contour of smooth rocks. Just remember if you happen to choose to explore Walsh Trail, start from Pacheco Ridge Road.

Parks Is Parks

by Ken Hulick

Do we need more parks? There will always be plenty of grass to play on, animals to see, open spaces to view, and places to visit. So what sense does it make to worry about that now? Why worry about parks when we have so much open space all around us?

Lots of reasons, but mainly because things never stay the same. If you don't believe that, just look in the mirror, or go back and see areas where you played as a child. Everything changes. As development continues inexorably, we need to remember that the very things that we treasure about living in California are at risk from our decisions—about what development takes place, and where, and what areas are going to be set aside to remain undeveloped. Can we imagine a time when there is nowhere to go to kick a ball, to take a child fishing, to see California condors soaring, and to hike a path where you can be by yourself? I am using the term "parks" very inclusively, to give an umbrella term for the parks, preserves, open space, monuments, forests, seashores, and recreation areas that are in our area.

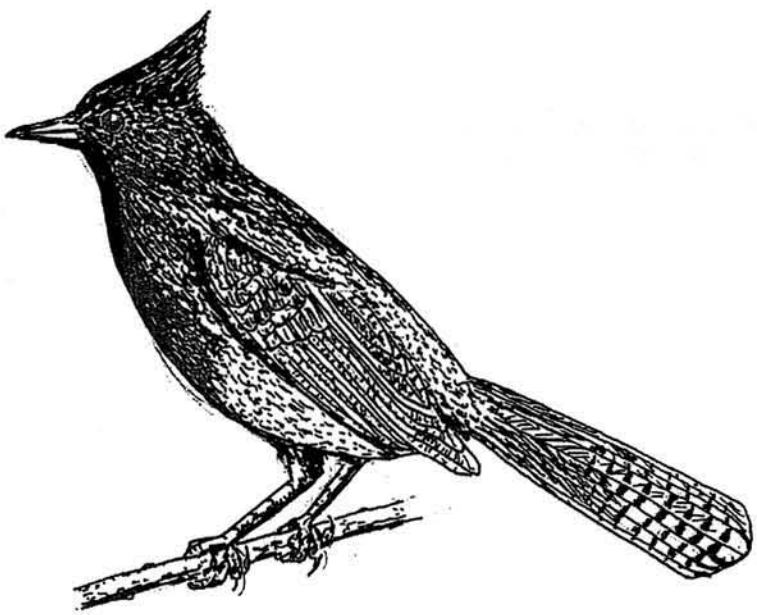
There are lots of reasons why we need parks, but primarily they are good for us and they are good for native plants and animals. They provide healthful outlets for our energy, let us experience a glimpse of the natural world, and, yes, enhance the value of our homes. They also are an important escape valve when family get-togethers make the house seem a little smallish. Having a place nearby to walk to, to re-create our sense of wellness, and to maintain fitness can be very important.

We are blessed with a wonderful system of city, county, state, and federal parks to enjoy. They didn't just happen—people recognized the values that those lands could provide well before development overtook them. And they acted through our political process, with incredible vision, to ensure that we would always have access to those areas. And lots of folks continued to fight to ensure that the park values are not impaired by inappropriate development—such as a major highway or reservoir in Henry Coe State Park, or tall buildings nearby that spoil the views along the creek-side trail at Anderson Lake County Park. We need to be vigilant to ensure that these areas are not degraded.

But looking farther down the road, we need to ensure that our local, statewide, and nationwide planning provides new areas for future residents and visitors to enjoy. Did you know that foreign visitors to places like Yosemite and Sequoia spend money that helps our balance of payments? Visitors to our local parks and forests spend money that supports local businesses. If you have seen a truck carrying several all-terrain vehicles at one of our gas stations, those folks were probably headed to nearby recreation areas.

Parks can occasionally be a problem. The human activities can be annoying to nearby residents, and wildlife frequently ranges outside parks, chewing on vegetation or on our domestic animals. We need to plan effectively to minimize these problems and to ensure there is plenty of wildlife habitat on private lands surrounding and augmenting our parks. Wildlife needs expanses of habitat to survive.

So when you next get the opportunity, stick up for one of your parks. They are yours, both to enjoy and to care for. They need our concern and involvement, our love and our desire to ensure that our children, and their children, will always have such areas to visit. So get involved in the process of planning for parks—it is to your benefit economically, health-wise, and as an altruistic expression of your concern for people yet unborn. Will future generations see parks as vestiges of a natural heritage degraded? Or will they see a vital system of areas that meet human needs, that provide places where we can enjoy vistas and experiences that enhance our lives, and where a range of human experiences are available. You decide—Parks **is** parks.



Park News

by Michael Ferry
Supervising Ranger

Wildfires threaten Henry Coe State Park!
Since the middle of June, we have had three wildland fires in the park. This is the hot news for the summer, and we are only half-way through the fire season!

The first fire started on June 23 and was located on the top of Blue Ridge, south of Mt. Sizer. This fire burned over 70 acres, which included the Black Oak Springs Trail. California Department of Forestry (CDF) took an aggressive approach with water tankers (airships) and hand crews to contain the burn. Bulldozers were brought in to build containment lines but were of little use due to the steep terrain. Once the fire was out, I spent an entire day with two CDF fire investigators combing the burn area looking for clues on how the fire started. By the end of the day, we had located the origin of the fire and to our amazement a most unlikely cause. Within the origin, we had found a broken hiker's signaling mirror (magnifying type) neatly propped up against an oak tree. It looked as if someone had been hiking along the road and decided to rest by sitting up against the tree. When they sat down and leaned up against the tree, the mirror, attached to the outside of the pack, broke in half, probably without the hiker ever knowing it (we found both halves of the mirror). Once the conditions were just right, high temperatures, low humidity, dry grass, and direct sunlight on the mirror at a perfect angle, combustion occurred. Although, this is all speculation, it certainly seemed to make sense, especially after ruling out most other possible causes.

The second fire that threatened Coe most of you probably read about in the newspaper. This was the Del Puerto Canyon Fire that started on July 9 out near Patterson. This was a very aggressive fire that spread quickly and was not easily contained due to rugged terrain. The fire consumed 11 structures, burned over 30,000 acres, and jumped 100' containment lines numerous times. By July 12, the fire quickly advanced to the northeast boundary of the park, south of Mt. Stakes. C.L. Price, Sector Superintendent, and I were called to the Incident Command Post (ICP). The ICP resembled something of a small city, housing over 2,000 firefighters, equipment, and a heliport. We were there as State Parks representatives attending briefings twice a day. It was our job to educate the planning chiefs to minimize the resource damage to that area of the park when using bulldozers (all thirty of them!). In other words, "tread lightly." Most of us feel that fire is a positive process for the park environment, and often we should "let it burn." I couldn't agree more. However, CDF was in no mood to let this fire burn through the park should it jump the containment line up on Mt. Stakes. CDF had planned to build three bulldozed containment lines (basically roads) through the heart of the Coe wilderness. Our plan was to have CDF

widen County Line Road and use this existing road as the contingent line should the fire jump the Mt. Stakes line. CDF estimated that letting the fire burn over to County Line Road would take several days with no guarantee that it would stop there. The fire was already costing close to $2 million a day. This was not an option in their eyes. In the end, the fire line up on Mt. Stakes held. However, a single blade bulldozer line went in along the old road up Robison Creek and up the ridge near the Mt. Stakes Trail. CDF came in after the fire was contained and spent several days doing restoration work along Robison Creek, smoothing out the blade cuts and berms. We are hoping it will barely be noticeable after the spring rains and the grasses grow. In my eyes, we were fortunate. Had we not been a part of the process at the ICP and had staff out on the fire line, I am sure we would have had three new roads through the Coe wilderness area.

The third fire occurred on July 30. I remember having a funny feeling when I woke up that morning. It was humid with lots of neat clouds drifting by. It looked as if it might rain. I immediately thought lightening. Sure enough, Coe Park took eight lightening strikes that day! Only one fire broke out that afternoon, when a bolt of lightening violently took off the top of a large oak tree. It was located off of Center Flats Road near Scherrer Pond. CDF took quick action with water tankers and hand crews putting the fire out promptly and keeping it to a few acres. No bulldozers were used to contain this fire.

It has been an interesting summer thus far, to say the least. Working closely with CDF, we have learned much about wildland fires and the politics involved. I can say State Parks relationship with CDF has improved greatly over the last several months. We have come a long ways since the Hoover fire three years ago. We now have a better understanding of CDF's expectations during a fire, and they understand our concerns when a fire is in Coe Park. Despite CDF having full command of a fire in our parks per written agency agreement, we now have a better line of communication with CDF, and this will continue to improve in the future. Is it perfect? No. Is there room for improvement? Always. I can assure you that everyone was doing the best they could possibly do under the circumstances.

Keep your fingers crossed that the fire threat stays low for the remainder of the season!

Stay cool! Think Cool!

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Wanted: Images of Coe

by Ron Erskine

We are looking for impressive digital photographs and video footage for an "Introduction to Coe Park"-type DVD that we are producing for park visitors. Landscapes, pictures taken at Coe events, fields of wildflowers—we would love to see anything you feel conveys what is special about the park. If you have these images in a digital format, please pick your five best ones and e-mail them to *coeimages@gmail.com.* If you have video footage or slides, let us know in an e-mail to the same address, and we will contact you. If we use your images, you must be prepared to give the PRA rights for the use of your images for this video. You will be listed as a contributor on the video credits.

Step forward, you closet Ansel Adamses. We know you are there. We look forward to seeing from you.

Park Research and Resource Management Conference

by Ken Hulick

A committee is forming to begin planning for a conference in 2008 that will showcase the research and resource management activities in Henry W. Coe State Park.

This conference will invite past and present research personnel from educational institutions, resource management organizations, user groups, environmental organizations, and historical organizations. The objective is to strengthen the park's ties to these institutions, to encourage non-consumptive research activities in the park, and to learn about research done elsewhere that could benefit park programs.

Areas of interest will include natural history, human history and prehistory, recreation, social science, park management, and similar areas of study.

Anyone interested in planning for this conference should contact me at *KenHulick2@aol.com.*

Nominations Sought for the Annual PRA Award

Each year at the PRA annual meeting held on an early Saturday in February, an award is presented to someone whose efforts have preserved and enriched Henry W. Coe State Park. It is not necessary that the recipient be a member of the Pine Ridge Association or be a uniformed volunteer in the park. Occasionally the award has been given to two people who had worked closely together to benefit the park. The recipient receives an engraved plaque, and the person's name is added to the large plaque that is displayed at the visitor center.

Two unofficial sets of criteria for selecting the recipient from among the nominees have been proposed:

- Leadership: scope, motivation, and initiative
- Involvement: scope, altruism, and time contribution
- Asset growth: recruiting, fund-raising, and contributions
- Ideas/projects: creative, innovative, follow-through with personal implementation
- Performance: past, sustained, future expectations
- Measurable accomplishments: visible results

- Has had a beneficial effect on the park's resources and activities
- Has sought out responsibility and has acted as a leader
- Has leveraged efforts into multiplicative effects by organizing the activities of others

We are asking PRA members to supply nominations for this award by the beginning of November. If there is someone you would like to nominate, please write a short paragraph of reasons why that person should be considered and send it to the PRA Secretary, Winslow Briggs, 480 Hale St., Palo Alto 94301 or Briggs@Andrew2.Stanford.edu. A committee of the PRA board of directors will collect additional information about the activities of your nominee and will make a selection.

Time to Run for the PRA Board

The Pine Ridge Association will hold its annual election for Board of Directors in December. The terms of two directors expire at the end of this year. Now is the time to prepare your candidacy statement and send it to the Board's Secretary, Winslow Briggs, 480 Hale St., Palo Alto 94301.

Any association member may run for the Board. A member may also nominate another PRA member. To do this, send Winslow a short statement explaining why you believe the person would be a good Board member, and he will contact your nominee to ask the person to consider running.

The most important qualification for a Board member is a willingness to attend Board meetings and to participate in carrying out tasks for the association. Meetings typically take place every other month on week nights. The term of office is three years. If a Board member is also a uniformed Coe Park volunteer, meetings and board-related activities count toward volunteer hours.

We use the special nonprofit bulk-rate mailing permit for sending out association-related materials. However, this means that some members might not receive their newsletters or other materials for a few weeks after they are mailed. So that the ballots can be distributed (and received by all members) in a timely fashion, it is important that all candidacy statements be postmarked on or before **Friday, November 10.** Please send your statements to Winslow at the address above. (If you plan to nominate someone else, please do so at least two weeks earlier.) Your statement might be a few paragraphs long and might contain information such as how long you have been a PRA member, why you became interested in Coe Park, ways that you have served the park or other volunteer activities in which you have benefited the public, any special qualifications or experience that you have, and specific plans that you have for improving the park as a Board member.

If you have any questions about what it would be like to be a Board member or if you would like additional guidance on putting together a candidacy statement, please call Board Vice-President Kevin Gilmartin at 650/851-7813.

New Members through August

by Margaret Mary McBride and Jim Wright

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

Kevin Goodwin and family, San Jose
Charles Horch, San Francisco
Ron Huff, Morgan Hill
Ken Lillemoen, Milbrae
Reeve Newton, San Juan Bautista
Rex and Lynn Peairs, San Martin
Harry Robinson, San Jose
Michael Sanchez, Sunnyvale

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

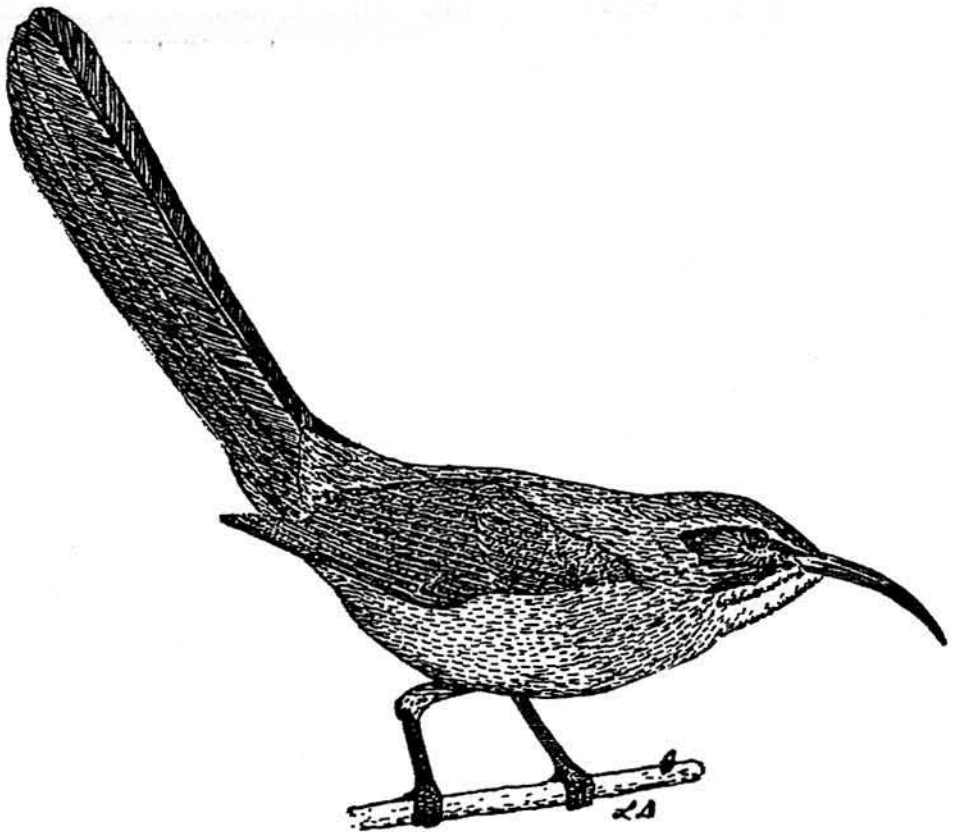
PRA Calendar

Saturday, October 7: **Ninth Annual Fall TarantulaFest and Barbecue.** This fun event sells out early, so please purchase your tickets soon. In addition, meal tickets must be purchased in advance. An order form is now available on the Coe Park website: *http://www.coepark.org/tfest.html*. Please call the Coe Park visitor center (408/779-2728) for more information.

Saturday and Sunday, October 21 and 22: **Springs Committee Work Weekend.** Join the Springs Committee and help maintain the springs in the park. For more information and to sign up, please contact Ruby Domino (408/779-4664).

Saturday, October 28: **Fall Trail Day.** Help maintain the trails at Coe Park. No previous experience is 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 25: **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).



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408/779-2728
http://www.CoePark.org

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Winslow Briggs, Secretary
Dan McCranie, Treasurer
Priscilla Campbell, Volunteer Committee Chair
Barbara Bessey
Ross Campbell
Ron Erskine
Bob Patrie

Michael Ferry, Supervising Ranger

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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 Coe State Park through education and interpretation. Articles and artwork relating to the natural history, 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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