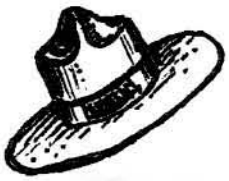
The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

Winter 2006

From under My Brim



by Barry Breckling

Spirits

On a peaceful night back in the early 1980s, I was sitting quietly in my park residence, the old Pine Ridge Ranch house, when I heard the distinctive sound of the visitor center door closing. I hurried to the visitor center and found no one leaving and no one inside. On another occasion, I came home and one of my kids asked me to go over to a small cabinet hanging on the wall and open it up. As I did, the hair on the back of my neck rose and my whole body got goose bumps. I was told that earlier, for no apparent reason, the spoons in the cabinet started swinging and had continued to swing for quite some time. That's the extent of my experiences with the spirits around headquarters, but several other people have experienced much more over the years.

I haven't heard them for some time now, but then I never heard them often anyway. Others have known of their presence, sometimes only as feelings, but more often by the sounds they made. Years ago, almost everyone who spent a night in the interpretation room below the visitor center reported that they heard sounds of the front door closing, chairs being scooted around, and even footsteps. Sada Coe told me that the spirits around the museum were probably attached to the settee or maybe the painting of her grandmother, Hannah Huntington Smith Coe, and that Hannah might even be one of the spirits. I was told that these were good spirits (even good spirits can make the hair on the back of your neck stand up!). The bad ones were found farther east. "Old-timers say, 'Joaquin still rides the hills as bold and reckless as ever.'"

People who've lived in the ranch house have often heard the museum door close late at night, with no evidence that anyone had gone in or come out. But other experiences have been more memorable. People have heard scratching on a wall where a door once existed, have seen a child being carried by a kindly old lady, have heard an unwound music box playing a tune, have seen a smiling, silent cowboy coming from and disappearing into nowhere, have found doors and drawers mysteriously opened, have seen a rocking chair rocking in front of the fireless fireplace and smelled the smoke of a fresh fire.

Another incident happened a short time after Sada Coe died. One evening, someone knocked at the ranch house door three times. My son, Mike, went to the door but found no one there. A few minutes later there were another three knocks, and again no one was there. It was then that we recalled a conversation we'd had with Sada. She had promised to return after she died. We asked how we would know she had returned, and she jokingly suggested that she would knock three times. We'd all laughed. Now we sat quietly in the ranch

Inside this issue . . .

Plans for prescribed burns in the park

The Dowdy Ranch entrance will open in the spring

Place names officially changed in the park

Coe Backcountry Weekend t-shirt contest

. . . and more!

house anticipating more knocks and then they came. One of us said, "Come in Sada." The doorknob turned, the door opened, and then closed.

Since that time, no one has reported hearing strange sounds around the ranch house or visitor center. I did have a strange experience a short while back, however. For years, an oil painting of Sada's grandmother had hung in the parlor room of the visitor center, and I'd always felt that Hannah looked sad in the painting and wore a notable frown, maybe even a scowl. When we converted the parlor to an office, we moved the picture to the room that is set up as the Coe's dining room. One day I looked at the painting in its new room and noticed that she now seemed to be smiling. Maybe she liked the dining room better than the parlor. I do believe that the spirits around the park headquarters are good spirits. I feel that they're watching over the land they loved and the heritage they left behind.

I Crossed a River . . .

by Mike Meyer

and moved up the bank on the rocks and sand, then stopped to look back. The water was up and down undulating smooth and glossy, and upstream it tumbled and was white in the sun over the rocks. It rained in the night but only a shower that morning, and the water was green and clear, the runoff silt settled. Sky pushed between the forested walls, a wedge that was blue just then. With branches leaning over the water, the oaks wave, and I see them with the river, and they wave like they know me, and the river rises and drops happily, but I don't think anything of it and only later notice the feeling about them.

I came down the Hectic Trail, crossed it, and went on my way. The land was wet and shiny. On the slopes water went through the grass in water trails and little falls. It pooled on the grass some places, the grass laid under it, and it splashed when your boots slapped down. You saw it in little courses running down and splaying smooth and shiny over flat stones the size of a softball and wrapping obstacles like the stick with leaves wadded around it. You heard it and found where it poured over and broke surface of a pool the size of a dinner plate sounding like the a little kid laughing, a happy sound, and saw, too, when it was a little bigger moving laterally and again below cutting back.

Showers came. You were with it and caught up by it and seeing it better than you ever had and giving it its due, and you look out not seeing trees but between you and the trees the drops in the sky falling but could not keep up and were surprised that they moved very fast. You tried to follow them and then you could, and it was each to a spot on the Earth and sometimes a collection of them held within its skin and had a shape-shiftingness, and you saw how it would bump another or get bumped and this place full of the bumped ones, and they grow and tilt and bulge lopsided then roll a little. Bumping and collecting and rolling. You stood seeing and in a wonder then but thinking still about happened to it and where it went and came back again, you thinking of the ways it came back a collection on rocks in the sun drying or on dirt sinking so roots drink and it flows through tree meat to the leaves and transpires back out into the air.

Later I had finished what I had gone to do and came back down through all the trees to the creek, and the path there was only a flattening of the rocks worn enough to follow and with broken trees because of the snow last winter and green floating leaves of the dogwood maybe, floaty like snowberry but bigger and floating like they are disconnected from the limb holding them and the light through the tree branches not yellow but of a filtery quality—it's washed through a film of gray smeared on the sky and so not so strong, and I came to the crossing place across from the Hectic Trail again. You wonder if you should tighten the pack down or loosen it because of the surging water, you don't know which, but the flow gets you, you can't wait and forget that and walk out, and it is then you brace and enter the river high between the Palassou and Mahoney ridges for the first time it seems. Crouching low against the strength and weight of the water against the thighs, the coldness chills you so you gasp air as a reaction, and because the rocks below are slick and your foot slides, you stay low and feel around with your foot to a lower rock or some gravel, but its pushing, and you have to catch your balance again anyway.

You push across and into the water deeper, and it is deeper than you'd expected, and your wits are alive, and the water at your waist makes your legs heavy to move, and when you begin to gain on the opposite bank, a relief comes but also a jolt of feeling at your life and the embrace of so wild and uncertain a thing as a river.

Then in the water on the rocks you are slogging, finding your footing toward the soil and trail, out and up and over and across toward the road that's way up, then you feel another kind of pull and you stop, breaking the momentum of travel, and look back. You stand, waiting, and you remind yourself of the ways the collection came into being, the wide, long entity you're seeing, but then it's just the big flow in its greatness and beauty and the trees and light and the clouds that are thickening above again. And you are alive on the land having crossed, and another consciousness is bumping yours, and it was something. It seemed that all of it smiled in river-smile and tree-smile and that they are family, and all they all wanted was for me to look. And I did, and it was what it wanted and made it happy.

Park News

by Michael Ferry
Supervising Ranger

The leaves have turned, the nights are cool, and the rain is near. Coe changes moods from fall to winter. It's a time for the park to refresh itself after a toasty summer.

The park concluded its special events for the season with the outstanding Tarantula-Fest and Barbecue. Some say it was the best T-Fest yet. The new volunteer training program went without a hitch, including the excellent ride-along training weekend. The Springs Committee finished up their final work weekend of the season.

I am excited to announce the news on Coe Park's prescribed burns plans. We have been planning a series of prescribed burns of 4,680 acres of chaparral and oak woodland to be conducted over a three- to five-year period in the Kelly Cabin Canyon approximately five miles southeast of park headquarters. The project area is divided into three plots of 980 acres, 1,650 acres, and 2,050 acres. One plot will be burned every one to two years until all three plots have been burned. If all goes well and the weather cooperates, we will be burning plot 1 this year, possibly by the end of November. A primary goal of this project is to reintroduce fire as a natural element in the ecosystem. Our department will be working with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to implement these burns as a part of the CDF's Vegetative Management Program.

Over a year or so ago, I told you we were going to construct a new restroom with shower facilities at the Coe Headquarters campground. Well, I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that the project came in over bid and was stalled. The project was redesigned as a restroom only without the showers. The good news is the project is back on track. Construction is scheduled to begin in the upcoming months.

The Dowdy Ranch will be opening this spring! We are gearing up to open this wonderful new facility, possibly as soon as April. We are planning a grand opening day (date to be announced) with all invited. If anyone is interested in being a camp host out there, please contact Ranger Cameron Bowers at *cbowe@parks.ca.gov.* There is a trail day scheduled for December 9 out at the Dowdy to cut back brush along the existing trails (North Creek Trail, Max's Corral Trail, etc.) weather permitting. Contact Rob Glover for details at *wrglover@yahoo.com*.

We have a new ranger to introduce to you. His name is Derek Davis. Ranger Davis just completed his field training program and has started his assigned position in the Gavilan Sector. Derek's primary responsibility will be Fremont Peak, San Juan Bautista, and the south end of Coe. If you see Derek, say hello. We will have more on Derek in the next issue of *The Ponderosa.*

Now we await the rain! I would be lying if I said I was not concerned. After last year's snow storms and tree failures, and reports of a possible "El Niño" year, not to mention Barry's animated and enthusiastic rain dance performance at the ride-along campfire program, who wouldn't be worried? We will just have to wait and see.

Happy Holidays!

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Wilson and Robinson or Willson and Robison??

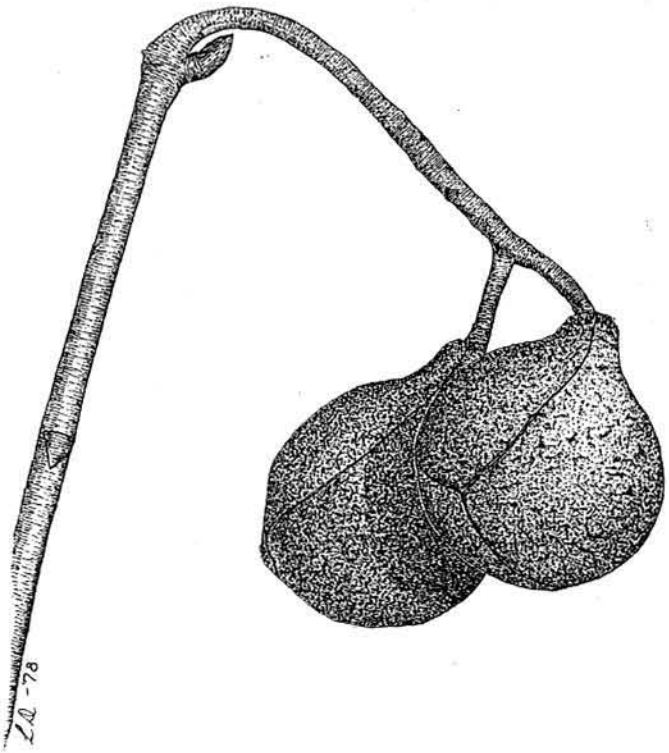
by Winslow Briggs

In 2002, the Pine Ridge Association produced the first full topographic map of Henry W. Coe State Park and purchased 5,000 paper and 5,000 plastic versions. By 2005 there were three compelling reasons to bring out a new edition of the map. First, there were four new acquisitions—the Gilroy Hot Springs Property and the Kickham Ranch, a small slice of property along County Line Road, and a larger property east of Mustang Peak. Second, the Lakeview Meadows acquisition, previously closed, was renamed the Lakeview Zone and opened to the public by the state both for day trips and as a backpacking zone. Finally, the map was sufficiently popular that we were likely to run out within a year. (We were close! When the second edition appeared, there were only a few hundred paper maps left and no plastic ones.)

As we began efforts to produce the revised map, we were reminded by our Coe Park historian, Teddy Goodrich, that there were two names on the original map—indeed on the USGS quadrangle maps—that were incorrect: Wilson (for Wilson Ranch and Wilson Peak) and Robinson for Robinson Canyon, Creek, and Mountain. She correctly pointed out that "Wilson" was actually named after the family of Horace Willson who arrived in California in 1853 and bought a great deal of land in the hills above Gilroy. "Robinson" was named after the Robison family. Milo Robison arrived in California in 1854, and his son, Eli Robison, settled near the confluence of Robison and Orestimba creeks in 1873. Armed with Teddy's extensive documentation including a copy of one of the original signed Robison homestead documents, we approached the U.S. Board of Geographic Names requesting that Wilson be officially changed to Willson and Robinson be officially changed to Robison on the USGS maps.

Although the response to our initial contact was negative, we nevertheless sent in the documentation and began waiting. Apparently the U.S. Board does not meet all that frequently, and if they do take positive action, it gets sent to the state

level for approval. If the state decision is favorable, their decision is then passed on to the appropriate county committee for their approval. If the county committee approves, they then notify the state board, which then notifies the national board, which then notifies us. Early last year we received a letter from the Executive Secretary of the Board, Roger Payne, informing us that the Board, "at its February 9, 2006, meeting approved your proposal to change officially the name of Robinson Creek in Stanislaus County to Robison Creek." Six months later we received a second letter, this time from Lou Yost, Executive Secretary of the Domestic Names Committee, stating that the Board, "at its August 10, 2006, meeting, approved your proposal to change officially the name of Wilson Peak in Santa Clara County to Willson Peak." Both names are now entered into the nation's official geographic names repository (*http://geonames.usgs.gov*) and are correctly designated on our map. Teddy deserves some special accolades for her careful and thorough research.



Aesculus californica

California buckeye

New Outdoor Maps for Coe Park

by Winslow Briggs

Volunteers and visitors are often found in clusters or alone at the wall map on the outside of the Visitor Center near Barry Breckling's office. The groups may be having animated discussions about where they were going or where they had been, and the quiet single individuals may be pondering a future hike or backpack or simply reliving a recent excursion of a few hours, a strenuous day, or perhaps a week in the back country. With the new edition of the map now available, the old wall map does not reflect new land acquisitions or changes in policy for visitor usage (the Lakeview zone is now open to the public). Thus the Pine Ridge Association Board voted to produce not one but five updated outdoor maps. One will replace the map currently at headquarters, one will be mounted in a roofed stand at a protected location inside the gate at Hunting Hollow, one will be placed similarly inside the Coyote Creek entrance near Gilroy Hot Springs, one will be placed on the office building at the Kickham Ranch, and one will be mounted on the outside of the new visitor center at the Dowdy Ranch entrance. The maps are currently in production and should arrive soon. Although it will take some time to get all of them in place, they will soon be providing visitors the detailed information they require to move safely through the park's magnificent 87,000 acres.

Coe Backcountry Weekend T-Shirt Contest: Submit Your Special Coe Image

by Diana Maloney

Believe it or not, we're already thinking about Coe Backcountry Weekend 2007! April 27–29 will be here before we know it. One of the traditions of Coe Backcountry Weekend is the special t-shirt. Do you have the right photo or drawing? We're looking for that distinctive image that says "This is Coe Park!" for the 2007 shirt.

Deadline for submissions is Friday, February 9. That's two weeks before the PRA Annual Meeting. We'll announce the winner of the Coe Backcountry Weekend contest at the meeting. To submit your photo or image now, contact Ann Briggs at 650/324-1455 or at *ambcoe@earthlink.net* or Bonnie Stromberg at *bonniestromberg@yahoo.com*.

What Is the Park?

by Ann Briggs

Henry W. Coe State Park is a place of superlatives . . . .

★ The largest state park in northern California. (Anza Borrego is the largest state park in California.)

★ The largest designated state wilderness within a state park (the 23,000-acre Orestimba Wilderness).

★ The largest de facto wilderness in Northern California (87,000 acres—no unauthorized vehicles allowed).

★ Has the best state park map in the California system (awarded to the Pine Ridge Association by the California League of Cooperating Associations in 2002).

★ Contains an unusual stand of the magnificent Ponderosa Pine. (The pine covered ridges are the first thing you notice as you approach headquarters—healthy, peaceful, and truly beautiful.)

★ In addition, the Pine Ridge Association has the first state park store to have merchandise available for purchase from the California State Parks Online Store. Check us out at *http://store.parks.ca.gov* and search for "Henry Coe."

New Members through October

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!

Paul Becker, Santa Rosa (family membership)
Shalom Bochner and Orli Loewenberg, Santa Cruz (family membership)
The Britton Family, San Martin
David Brush, San Jose
Evelyn and James Estes, Mountain View
Cynthia Leeder, San Jose
Paul Nellis, Gilroy (family membership)
Roger and Lisa Schrag, Oakland
Carla Stanford and Mike Lazetera, Morgan Hill
Burt Welsh, San Jose

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

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

PRA Calendar

Saturday, February 24, 2007: **PRA Annual Meeting.** All PRA members are invited to attend the association's annual meeting and graduation of the new class of uniformed volunteers. Note that the date is later than in previous years. A flyer containing more information will be distributed in January.

See you at Coe Park!

We wish you a very happy and healthy Holiday Season!

Stay tuned for information about our 2007 spring events, including:

- **Trail Day**
- **PRA hikes**
- **Coe Backcountry Weekend**
- **Mother's Day Breakfast**

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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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