The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park

Summer 2007

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

Brimming Over

Almost 30 years ago I wrote my first "Brim" article in *The Ponderosa*, the fledgling newsletter of the Pine Ridge Association. I knew there must be something under the wide brim of my Stetson that I could share with people who enjoy Coe Park. I had, after all, spent a lot of time in the Diablo Range. I grew up running in the hills around Lafayette, working a season at Lafayette Reservoir, working with animals and kids at Alexander Lindsey Junior Museum in Walnut Creek, and being a park aide at Mt. Diablo State Park. These were the mountains where I first learned about snakes, rocks, trees, squirrels, bugs, and wildflowers, and it was already a place I'd come to love.

After a few years away from my favorite mountains, I returned to them at a place called Henry W. Coe State Park. It took me no time at all to realize how special Coe was, and the park grew more precious to me with each passing year. Early on I realized that I was brimming over with ideas for stories and articles I wanted to write so I could share my love of Coe Park.

Sometimes, in recent years, I'd find myself overloaded with work or short on ideas and realize that my article was due yesterday. The answer to this dilemma was simple: resurrect an old article. It's surprising how short our memories can be. After reissuing a four- or five-year-old article, no one ever mentioned to me that they remembered reading it before. On several occasions, I rewrote articles to improve them, especially after getting together with my editor, my wife Judy, a dozen years ago.

Over the years, people encouraged me to collect my stories in the form of a book. After Winslow Briggs gently suggested a book several times, I decided that it might be a good idea. The book, like many of our park projects, took longer to complete than expected, but in 2005, Judy and I finished the book, with 14 of my stories in it.

My favorites are *Sometimes Things Just Fall into Place*, a true story of mountain lions in my life; *Prairie Wolves*, an informative but not so true story about coyotes; *Pronghorn*, more fact-filled fabrication; *Life's Blood*, a story about water (in which the word "water" does not appear).

Will I miss writing Brim articles? Sure. It's part of the whole that is Coe Park to me, and I'll certainly miss Coe after living and working here for half my life (so far).

Even more than Coe's pine covered ridges, fields of flowers,

Inside this issue . . .

Barry Breckling's last "From under My Brim" article

Barry Breckling receives the Olmsted Award!

Moonlight hike in August from the Dowdy entrance

Invitation for **you** to become a uniformed volunteer

. . . and more!

and oak woodlands, I'll miss the people—the volunteers, the staff, and the visitors, those who have also been enriched by the charms of Coe Park.

Times change, and it's time for me to make changes. I'm excited and really looking forward to new things, our new house in the Sierra Nevada foothills and a long list of projects, sure to include more story writing.

With this, my final From under My Brim article, I'm hanging up my broad-brimmed Stetson.

A Passion for Wildness: Barry Breckling and Coe Park

by John Wilkinson

After almost thirty years as resident ranger at Henry Coe State Park, Barry Breckling is retiring this month. He will be greatly missed by visitors to the park and by the many dedicated Coe volunteers as he and his wife, Judy, move to their new home in the Sierra foothills.

Barry grew up in Lafayette and attended Humboldt State University where he majored in wildlife management. ("I was going to major in forestry until I found out that what they taught you was how to cut down trees.") After graduation he worked for a while as a park aide and seasonal ranger at Mt. Diablo and later put in a six-year stint at Seacliff Park near Santa Cruz. ("It was all right, but I got tired of being a cop and dogcatcher.") Then in November 1977, he was offered the resident ranger position at Henry Coe State Park, which he has held ever since. He has turned down opportunities for promotion that would have taken him away from Coe, being more devoted to the park than to career building.

When I asked about early notable experiences in Coe, Barry recounted a cross-country hike he had taken in the vicinity of what is now the Flat Frog Trail, when he spotted what he thought at first was a bobcat. A closer look revealed a long tail, and he realized it was a young mountain lion. As he approached, the cub ran off towards its mother. Since then, Barry has seen over 20 mountain lions in the park, and they are his favorite wild animal.

Barry's love for creatures that others might want to shun led him to organize a series of public "dangerous animal" hikes: a mountain lion hike, a rattlesnake hike, a tarantula hike. The tarantula hike was the most successful, and eventually grew into the annual fall Tarantula Fest and Barbecue. It's a real treat to see kids who are at first leery of the big hairy spiders start competing for the privilege of holding them and watching them crawl over their hands.

In 1980 Barry started the volunteer program in the Park. From a seed group of eight (three of them still active), the dedicated crew has grown to almost 130. Many visitors to the park don't realize that there are only two rangers there. (Right now there are three: John Verhoeven recently joined the ranger staff, but after Barry leaves there will again be only two.) Almost all those other friendly and helpful folks in uniform are volunteers.

As a longtime hiker in Coe, I can't remember when I first met Barry. It was more a process of gradually becoming aware of this big friendly guy who always seemed to have time to talk and listen, and who never called your attention to the fact that he was in fact the resident ranger. Long-time volunteer Libby Vincent had a similar first impression. She describes going into the Visitors' Center at a time when, like me, she wasn't clear on the difference between rangers and uniformed volunteers, and instantly knowing that "he was the guy I wanted to ask my question of."

I got to know him much better during the struggles of 2003 and 2004 to defend the park against the Santa Clara Valley Water District's proposal to dam Pacheco Creek and the High Speed Rail Authority's proposal to route the train along or under Robison Creek in the Orestimba Wilderness. I will always remember Barry's eloquent and heartfelt testimony at the High Speed Rail public meeting in San Jose.

Barry is a very gifted nature writer. His beautiful little essay "Life in an Oak Tree" is an example. In less than three thousand words, framed by a story from his boyhood, he manages to beguile the unsuspecting reader into learning about mosses, lichens (three kinds), fungi, mistletoe, wasps, jays, woodpeckers, hawks, deer, the Native American use of acorns, and more. The writing is as clear as Coyote Creek, and of an enviable simplicity.

Barry's and Judy's new home is outside of Yosemite, at 3,400 feet, with a view of the Clark Range. They plan to work on a book on Yosemite wildflowers, and he hopes to continue his creative writing. He spoke of a book on "ranger techniques: the stuff they don't teach you in ranger training." They also hope to be able to gather morels.

Meanwhile the park to which he has given so much will continue to welcome, challenge, inspire, and enlighten hikers, backpackers, equestrians, and mountain bikers in the years to come.

In recognition of all he has done for Coe Park and for those who enjoy this priceless wild resource, the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club has awarded Barry a special certificate of recognition.

(This article is reprinted with the permission of the Sierra Club. It was originally published in the May/June issue of the *Loma Prietan.*)

Park News

by Michael Ferry
Asilomar Sector Superintendent

Breaking News!

Barry Breckling receives the Olmsted Award for Leadership and Vision

Frederick Law Olmsted, father of the American Park Movement, was the first to fully and persuasively describe the physical and psychological importance of the park experience to urban dwellers. He believed that bringing the countryside into the city could help cure many of society's ills and further the social and democratic ideals of America.

The Olmsted Award is given out annually by our department and is part of the Director Recognition Awards. Barry received his award from Director Ruth Coleman on June 4 in Sacramento. This is a fitting end to a fabulous career of almost 30 years.

Over the years, Barry has inspired many to write books, lead nature walks, and explore the far reaches of Coe Park. Below are some of my favorite quotes that helped convince the committee to choose Barry:

"Barry inspired me to become a ranger. He is my childhood image of what a ranger should be. The plants and animals are his family, and the visitors are treated like guests in his home." Ranger Cameron Bowers.

"When I first became a volunteer, I asked Barry how long he intended to stay at Henry W. Coe, because in the back of my mind, I thought in three years he would move on. He replied, 'Twenty years at least. On second thought, a lifetime is not enough.'" Teddy Goodrich.

Congratulations Barry!

Barry Breckling with Director Ruth Coleman (R. Rideout)

Volunteers and PRA members in Sacramento with Barry (R. Rideout)

Other news

The Coe Backcountry Weekend was held April 27–29. The weather was perfect, warm sunshine with an occasional breeze. This year we let backpackers enter the park at 1 p.m. on Friday. This was a big hit! It allowed visitors to enter the park over a wider range of time. This resulted in less traffic congestion on the road. The weekend had a casual feel to it. I am not sure if it was less traffic on the road or Barry's last CBW (working anyway). Barry did perform his classic rain dance again this year at the very popular campfire, so we will have to wait and see if it works.

The Mother's Day Breakfast, Sunday, May 13, also went off this year without a hitch. This special event is getting quite a reputation and seems to be getting better every year. This was a great way to spend the day with Mom on that special day.

The Dowdy Ranch is open! Saturday, May 19, was the big day that we have all been waiting for. Fun was had by all during this wonderful event, especially seeing familiar faces from the past. If you missed the grand opening, make sure you get a chance to check out this new day-use facility. It's a beauty! The Dowdy Ranch will be open on weekends and holidays from 8 a.m. to sunset through Oct 15. Stop by the visitor center and say hello to Mason Hyland, who will be working out there most of the summer.

It is with great regret that I announce I will be leaving the Gavilan Sector. I have been selected as the new superintendent of the Asilomar Sector of the Monterey District. This challenging sector includes Monterey State Historic Park, Asilomar State Beach, and Asilomar Conference Grounds located in Pacific Grove. It was a tough decision for me to leave. I can honestly say the last 3½ years at Coe have been the best of my career. I have enjoyed working with all of you. I have learned much and now take that with me to help other departmental programs. Coe has provided me with a solid foundation to follow. I thank you for the experience and look forward returning to Coe someday and working again with great people in a special place known as Henry W. Coe State Park.

Have a safe and wonderful summer.

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Here is a trivia question for you. Who is the tall guy without a stetson in this photo taken by Mike Harper at the grand opening of the Dowdy? It is Barry Breckling, the ranger at Coe park of almost 30 years who retired in June of this year. He is hanging up his "brim" and moving to the Sierras. He is pictured with State Park Rangers Dennis Poole and Cameron Bowers, Sector Superintendent Lee Sencebaugh of the new Four Rivers Sector of the Central Valley District, and Sector Superintendent C.L. Price of the Monterey District.

August 25–26: Burra-Burra Moonlight-Daylight Hike-Hike

by Bill Gingras

The Burra-Burra Moonlight-Daylight Hike-Hike will take place this year on the weekend of August 25 and 26.

The B-B M-D H-H has been a PRA tradition for many years, and takes place in the backcountry of Henry Coe State Park. Attendees of the event can arrive when they want on Saturday, August 25, and spend the afternoon hiking or just relaxing. After dinner, when the sun goes down and the moon rises, we set out on a hike to Burra-Burra peak where we can listen to the night sounds and view what the surrounding landscape looks like under a full moon. You'll be amazed at the dramatic moonlit scene around you, and be as equally amazed by the constant symphony that fills the air, courtesy of the Coe nightlife. The following morning, we repeat the hike and ob-

serve the differences between the night sounds and scenes and those in the daytime.

A few details are as follows: Plan to arrive on August 25 after 1 p.m. but no later than 8:30 p.m. Camping for this event is recommended (at the Dowdy visitor center). If you plan to camp, bring your own food (dinner, breakfast, and snacks), camping gear, and a chair. Propane-fired barbecue grills will be available.

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

TFest: Saturday, October 6

by Rick Leonard

It's time to start thinking about the fall TarantulaFest. The annual barbecue offers a choice of Santa Maria steak, marinated chicken, gardenburgers, or hotdogs. Each meal includes beans (vegetarian or regular), grilled bread, salad, and watermelon. Soda, beer, and wine will be available at nominal prices.

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

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

Again we are fortunate to have the Tarantula Band to entertain us with a lively and fun selection of music. An order form will be available on the park website in August. Additional information? Contact me at *dadoco7@aol.com*.

An Invitation to Join the Uniformed Volunteer Program

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

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

There is a series of classes offered each fall that all new uniformed volunteers take. Topics in the next classes include geology, geography, climate, ecosystems, plants, animals, humans in the park, history of the park, being a volunteer, dealing with the public, interpretive techniques, and first aid. The training will be held at the park on eight weekend days from September 8, 2007, through the beginning of December. Some of the training will occur during hikes and a camp-out in the park. Graduation will be held during the annual meeting of the PRA on February 2, 2008.

Applications are available now. August 11 is the deadline for receipt of applications. Applicants will receive a telephone call to set up a short interview, which will be on August 16, 18, or 19 at park headquarters. If you have any questions or if you would like to obtain an application, call the park at 408/779-2728, or visit our web site at *www.CoePark.org*.

Wildflower Book for Coe Park Now Available

Barry Breckling's *Spring Wildflowers of Henry W. Coe State Park and the Inland San Francisco Bay Area* is now available at the park's visitor center for $21.74 plus tax. With their discount, PRA members pay only $20.00 including tax. If you are a PRA member and want to have the book mailed to you, write a check to PRA for $24.75 and send it to PRA, 9100 E. Dunne Ave., Morgan Hill, CA 95037. (Non-member price is $28.25.)

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!

Calvin Dryden, Gustine
Pat Potter McAndrews and Butch Kittle, San Jose
Dave Naumann, 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 Bylaws Change
by Winslow Briggs,
Secretary of the PRA Board of Directors

The Pine Ridge Association membership recently voted by mail ballot on the following changes to Article IV, Section I of the Association bylaws, proposed by the PRA Board:

The Board of Directors shall be composed of seven elected directors plus the Cooperating Association Liaison, ~~and~~ the Chair of the Volunteer Committee (unless she/he is already a director)~~.~~, **and the Treasurer**. The Chair of the committee of uniformed volunteers **and the Treasurer** shall be ~~a~~ voting member**s** of the Board. No reduction of the authorized number of directors shall have the effect of removing any director prior to the expiration of the director's term of office.

Changes are indicated by strike-through or bold face plus underline.

The final vote: 135 members approved of the bylaws change and 23 disapproved of it. Thus the Treasurer is now added as a voting member of the board.

PRA Calendar

Saturday and Sunday, July 21 & 22: **The Springs Committee Work Weekend.** Join the Springs Committee and help maintain the springs in the park. There will be other springs work weekends throughout the year. For more information and to sign up, please contact Ruby Domino (408/779-4664).

Saturday, August 11: **Deadline to submit applications to become a Uniformed Volunteer.** Uniformed Volunteers play an important role in staffing the Visitor Center and providing interpretive programs to the public. Please see the article on page 6 for more information about the Uniformed Volunteer Program. For information about what a Uniformed Volunteer does and to download an application, please check out this link on the Coe Park website: *http://www.coepark.org/volprogram.html.* If you would like to participate, please call the Visitor Center for additional information (408/779-2728). Interviews will be held on August 16, 18, and 19.

Saturday and Sunday, August 25 & 26: **The Burra Burra Hike Weekend.** This is a wonderful outing—both during the full moon and then the next morning during the day. Please see the article on page 5 for more information.

Saturday, October 6: **Annual Fall TarantulaFest and Barbecue.** Please see the article on page 6 for information on this fun-filled day. Contact Rick Leonard (408/226-3100) for more information.

Saturday, November 3: **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 Coe Park website describes what a typical trail day is like: *http://www.coepark.org/trailwork.html.*

Saturday, November 24: **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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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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