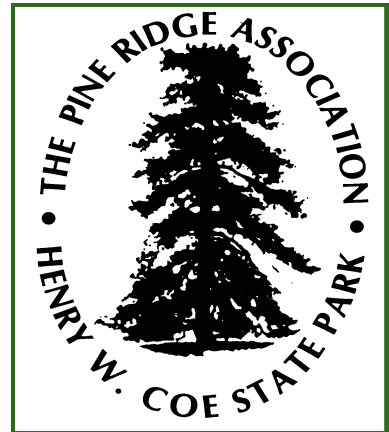


The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter
Henry W. Coe State Park



Spring 2017

2017 Graduation Class and Annual Award Winners



2017 volunteer graduation class



Golden Bear award
Sue Dekalb



Volunteer of the year
Michael Hundt

Photos by Shae Collinge.

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PRA Annual Meeting

By Barbara Bessey

The annual meeting of the Pine Ridge Association was held in Morgan Hill on February 4, 2017.

There were fifteen new volunteers in the fall training class; and all graduated: Elena Armstrong, Harry Cline, Steve Goldblatt, Michael Ingrassia, John Jenkins, Lilia Kilmer, Jim Loweecey, Robert Method, Dan Olson, Keiko Olson, Chris Prendergast, Nicholas Smith, Jesus Valdez, Sabine Whitechurch, and Maria Zayed. The total number of uniformed volunteers is now 136. These individuals volunteered 18,478 hours during the year.

Nine volunteers who served 50 or more hours beyond the training program advanced to full volunteer status:

Rick Casey
 Don Clare
 Adam Escoto
 Kelly Kersten
 Kathy McBride
 Joe Navratil
 Stu Nuttall
 Eric Pape
 Pauline Wood

Five volunteers who had served 250 hours or more, including 100 hours spent working in the visitor center, were advanced to senior volunteer: Liz Brinkman, Paul Gillot, Bill Schlotter, Don Wong, and James Wong.

Forty volunteers received the visitor service award, a special multitool with an embedded LED flashlight. These volunteers spent 48 or more hours working in the visitor center or on other visitor-related activities during the past year, for example, presenting programs to visitors or leading hikes and participating in interpretive events:

Heather Ambler	Don Holmes	Joanne Rife
Chere Bargar	Ken Hulick	Pat Scharfe
Jim Brady	Michael Hundt	Greg Scott
Winslow Briggs	Jodie Keahey	Rob Sinclair
David Cartwright	Linda Keahey	Susan Stillman
Dale Combs	Gary Keller	Carolyn Straub
Mark Deger	Cynthia Leeder	Kitty Swindle
Sue DeKalb	Kathryn Levine	John Thatcher
Bonnie Doran	Paul Liebenberg	Bev VanderWeide
Ed Fox	Kelly Lind	Don Wong
Bill Frazer	Jim Mason	James Wong
Patrick Goodrich	Margaret Mary McBride	Pauline Wood
Teddy Goodrich	Steve McHenry	Jim Wright
Sue Harwager		

Thirteen volunteers received special recognition for all the hours they have spent on Coe Park volunteer activities over the years. Between them, they have donated 49,486 hours to the park! David Cartwright, Paul Gillot, and Michael Hundt volunteered at least 1,000 hours of service. Dan Healy volunteered at least 2,000 hours of service. Jim Brady and Paul Liebenberg volunteered at least 3,000 hours of service. Sue DeKalb, Jodie Keahey, Linda Keahey, and Mike Meyer volunteered at least 4,000 hours of service. Martie Sinclair volunteered at least 7,000 hours of service. And Chere Bargar and Bill Frazer volunteered more than 8,000 hours of service!

PRA Annual Meeting, continued....

A special silver pin with the PRA logo was presented to Dick Rawson, who has participated in the uniformed volunteer program for ten or more years. A special gold pin with the PRA logo was presented to Mike Meyer, who has participated in the uniformed volunteer program for twenty or more years. And a special bronze pin with the PRA logo was presented to Chere Bargar, who has participated in the uniformed volunteer program for more than thirty years

Ranger Cameron Bowers presented annual passes to California State Parks to 45 volunteers who had donated 200 hours or more within the past year and to couples whose combined number of hours totaled 200 hours or more. The hours include the time spent by some uniformed volunteers who volunteered time at other state parks, and the time that some non-uniformed individuals volunteered at Coe Park:

Heather Ambler	Bill Frazer	Mike Meyer
Chere Bargar	Paul Gillot	Karen Pogue
Joseph Belli	Patrick Goodrich	Art Pon
Dan Benefiel	Teddy Goodrich	Dick Rawson
Jim Brady	Dan Healy	J.J. Sasaki
Victor Bubbett	Ken Hulick	Eric Simonsen
David Cartwright	Michael Hundt	Martie Sinclair
Rick Casey	Jodie Keahey	Rob Sinclair
Don Clare	Linda Keahey	Susan Stillman
Dale Combs	Cynthia Leeder	Carolyn Straub
Thomas Conrad	Kathryn Levine	Kitty Swindle
Mark Deger	Allene Liebenberg	Ted Tawshunsky
Sue DeKalb	Paul Liebenberg	John Thatcher
Larry Fitterer	Steve McHenry	Dave Waldrop
Ed Fox	Robert Method	Pauline Wood

Ranger Cameron Bowers presented free annual passes to State Parks within the Monterey District to 39 volunteers (uniformed and non-uniformed) who had donated at least 72 hours but fewer than 200 hours (and to families whose combined number of hours totaled between 72 and 200 hours):

Ann Briggs	Janet Koff	Pat Scharfe
Winslow Briggs	Daniel Lewis	Greg Scott
Liz Brinkman	Jim Mason	Heike Stabenow
Laura Dominguez-Yon	Kathy McBride	Rainer Stabenow
Bonnie Doran	Margaret Mary McBride	Lynne Starr
David Godkin	Stu Nuttall	Dick Stone
Sue Harwager	Lori Oleson	Lourdes Stone
Judy Hayamizu	Dan Olson	Philip Strenfel
Don Holmes	Keiko Olson	Bev VanderWeide
Ken Howell	Eric Pape	Libby Vincent
Bob Kass	David Perrin	Jim Wright
Gary Keller	Manny Pitta	Dean Yon
Irwin Koff	Diane Scariot	Ligaya Yrastorza

The PRA volunteer of the year award is given to individuals who have contributed outstanding work in furthering the mission of the association in preserving and enriching Coe Park. This year's award went to Michael Hundt. Michael joined the uniformed volunteer program in 2013. In 2016, he volunteered over 500 hours, and he has volunteered over 1,400 hours since joining the program. He is passionate about outreach and sharing Coe Park with park lovers at many external events. In 2016, he set up booths at nine fairs to talk about Coe Park; these booths reached 2,100 visitors. Visitors are encouraged to check out meetup.com to learn about the various interpretive hikes and talks that are available. He also was able to secure a \$10,000 grant from the California State Parks Foundation to help restore the white barn.

Continued on page 16....

Samuel Sizer

By Teddy Goodrich, PRA Historian

Have you hiked the Mt. Sizer challenge—the fourteen-mile loop to Blue Ridge on the old Government Trail and back to the visitor center by way of Poverty Flat? If so, you passed the actual peak of Mt. Sizer marked by a radio repeater tower. The name of the peak commemorates one of the park's earliest settlers.

Who was Samuel Sizer? Henry Coe knew him well and his son, Henry Sutcliffe Coe, remembered how his father described him. "He was an educated man. I would say he was a Cornell man. He was a refined gentleman; there weren't many around in those days."

While there is no proof that Samuel Sizer attended Cornell, there is a very good possibility he did. Samuel Elliot Sizer was born in 1850 into a prosperous family in Buffalo, New York. Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, is a land grant college and early studies there focused on agriculture. In California, Sizer would be known as a stock raiser, specializing first in sheep then branching out to raise cattle and hogs as well.

By 1875, Sizer was living in Alameda County, California, in a small community near Lake Merritt called Brooklyn. If indeed he had studied at Cornell, he may have been continuing his studies at the newly formed University of California, also a land grant college where early classes emphasized agriculture. The new university had no campus, and the first classes were held on the old College of California campus at 13th and Franklin Streets in northeast Oakland. Sizer's 1875 Brooklyn voter registration identifies his occupation as "searcher." Perhaps the recorder meant to write researcher?

In 1883 Sizer bought three timber claims of approximately 30 acres each near Blue Ridge, thus avoiding the five-year waiting period to prove up on a homestead claim. Several years prior to his purchase he built a cabin on Cold Flat on one of the parcels. On another, adjacent to a good spring, he built corrals and shearing pens for his sheep and also raised hay and garden produce. This parcel came to be known as Sizer Flat and would be used in later years by Henry Coe and his neighbors when they gathered cattle for branding.

By the mid-1880s, Sizer had expanded his stock raising operation into Fresno County. August 1885 found him in San Benito County. The circumstances have been lost to time, but he died suddenly in Tres Pinos, California on August 19, 1885. He was thirty five years old.

When Henry Coe filed his homestead claim at Cold Flat he and his brother, Charles, moved into Sizer's old cabin. The now famous photo by Andrew P. Hill of Charles, Henry, Preston Thomas, Clarence Darrow, and two unidentified men, was taken at Sizer's cabin about 1889.



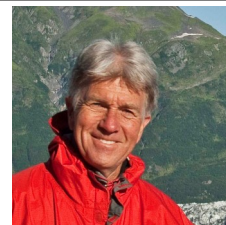
Samuel Sizer cabin at Cold Flat.
Photo by Andrew P. Hill.



Coe family and cattle ranchers at Sizer Flat.
Photo from State Park archives.

Volunteer Ron Erskine and the Necessity of Wilderness

By Peter Verbica



John Muir writes “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity.” For Ron Erskine, Coe Park volunteer and former Pine Ridge Association board member, Muir’s observations serve as a trail-marker for his outdoor adventures. Builder, Eagle Scout, author, husband, father, third-generation California native, and Coe Park volunteer, Ron was raised in Mill Valley, California. He grew up at the foot of Mount Tamalpais with its redwoods, chaparral, and oak. As a boy, he would hike by Barth’s Retreat, past Rifle Camp and Potrero Meadows, up to the blue-gray peak and look down in awe over San Francisco Bay.

Ron’s first exposure to the great outdoors didn’t go as well. At nine years of age, he was packed into the back of a flatbed truck with other campers from a church boys’ choir and taken into the Sierra for what he describes ruefully as a “Lord of the Flies” experience. The boys were disciplined with a breadboard and he still remembers eight-mile forced marches weighed down with a green canvas backpack without pads or a waist strap. Luckily, as he was growing up he fell in with a group of Boy Scouts and benevolent Scoutmaster Jack Barnard. As an Eagle Scout, Ron would complete merit badges on citizenship, first aid, swimming, and hiking. Early family car-camping trips in Ron’s youth exposed him to the beauty of D.L. Bliss State Park in Lake Tahoe and McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park, northeast of Lake Shasta.

Ron spent two years as a Gaucho at U.C. Santa Barbara near the Santa Ynez Mountains and with spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean. He then graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder, known for its own hiking spots including the Flatirons, Boulder Falls, and Mount Sanitas. Perhaps the most important hike of Ron’s life, though, occurred at Havasu Falls on the Havasupai Reservation, Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona. It was there that he met and fell in love with his wife, Renee, Stanford alumna and career counselor. Renee, born and raised in Gilroy, helped pull Ron away from his frenetic life in the financial district of San Francisco. They settled to raise a family among the poppy-covered hillsides of the South Bay.

Since we’re on the topic of family, Ron passed on his love of the outdoors to his son, Drew. He writes about the experience in his autobiographical *Measureless Mountain Days: A Father and Son on the John Muir Trail*. Drew had just turned 18 and was between junior and senior years in high school. His dad was trying to maintain boundaries for his son at home and the two were often at odds. Ron recalls that the three-week hike with his son bonded them with a common goal and gifted them both with indelible life lessons. Ron’s sense of adventure has also been passed down to his daughter, Vanessa, who obtained her M.B.A. from Pepperdine and is exploring the world and supporting efforts that involve the empowerment of women and orphans in Rwanda and Ghana.

An article about Ron would be remiss without mentioning his love of and involvement with Coe Park as both a volunteer and board member of the Pine Ridge Association (PRA). Ron served a total of five terms through the 1990s and 2000s on the PRA board, helping guide the organization and secure its future. When asked about his favorite spots at Coe Park he admits to many including Rooster Comb, which he first toured with neighbor Celia McCormack, and the San Antonio Valley with its broad, wide open area. Ron still speaks with reverence when describing how he watched a herd of elk gallop through the wildflowers while doing trail work with Mike Meyer and Rob Glover.

Ron continues to hike and recently hiked the Wind River Range in Wyoming, not too far from Jackson Hole, and worked his way over Sheperd Pass out of Independence in the Southern Sierra to the Wallace Lake and Wright’s Lake basins. When asked for hiking tips, he shares a few jewels, including that it’s okay to spend money on a light and warm sleeping bag, that if you encounter a bear wanting your food, beat on pots with a spoon, but if the bear gets into your food, you’re better off letting him have it. Ron also advises that freeze-dried food uses less cooking fuel when you’re hiking and that unless it’s raining or bugs are out in the open, he prefers to sleep under the stars without a tent.

Continued on page 14....

Southern Alligator Lizard

By Joseph Belli

When I sat down to write about the largest of Coe Park's seven lizard species, I was mostly interested in their size; how big can they get, after all? As a kid, I heard rumors of alligator lizards two feet long but the longest



Alligator Lizard. Photo by Joseph Belli.

I've ever seen was an estimated fifteen inches. I say estimated because I wasn't about to pick it up. I placed my foot-long boot alongside its body and came up about three inches short. The lizard, which I noticed at the base of a gray pine in the Orestimba Wilderness, promptly scurried up my pant leg all the way to the back of my neck. That was more than surprising; it was unnerving. I had visions of returning with one less ear, like van Gogh, only without the outstanding artistic ability. But my fears were unfounded. Finding nothing of interest it climbed down and scurried off.

Finding out how large Southern alligator lizards grow proved more difficult than I thought. Simply looking up size ranges in field guides and websites didn't provide a satisfactory answer because lizards are measured from snout to vent rather than to tail tip. Tail measurements aren't included because they're unreliable—lizards often lose their tails and regrown tails are never as long as the original. The largest size I could find for a Southern alligator lizard was 178 mm, which translates to seven inches. Some sources added that alligator lizards often have tails twice as long as the rest of the body yet none mentioned a 21-inch alligator lizard, which was what I was really after. But while looking for a possibly mythical two-foot long alligator lizard I came across other things that were even more interesting.

As lizards go, alligator lizards are large, secretive, and not especially quick. They shun deserts and barren surroundings, and in drier regions are concentrated around riparian habitats. In fact, they prefer moist environments. They have a low metabolic rate even for a lizard and are active at cooler temperatures, as low as 50 degrees. They also have a low tolerance for heat. Because they don't position themselves prominently on boulders, they're not often noticed. They're sometimes seen shuffling through leaf litter or beneath cover objects such as logs. When running, they do so in a side-to-side waddle that's slower than that of fence lizards. Like fence lizards they can climb and can even use their prehensile tail to grasp branches. When confronted by a predator, alligator lizards rely on their bite, which is strong, and if handled they'll also discharge excrement. Two good reasons to avoid grabbing them.

Like many other lizards, alligator lizards can also drop their tail, but the most clever defense strategy was by one confronted by a snake. To avoid being eaten the lizard put its own tail in its mouth, making it too wide to swallow. Alligator lizards may also take to water to escape, plunging in and swimming away. I don't think that's how they got their name but it's appropriate because alligator lizards also submerge to catch tadpoles, one of many items in a varied diet that includes any living thing they can swallow, including other lizards, nestling birds, and small mammals. Unlike most lizards, alligator lizards rely heavily on scent to find food, much as some snakes do, by flicking their tongue to capture scent molecules in the air. When the tongue retracts, those molecules are transferred to the Jacobson's organ above the roof of the mouth and analyzed. In effect, they're smelling with their tongue. They can polish off a prodigious amount of food: a captive consumed 20 small grasshoppers, 11 katydids, 7 shield bugs, and 3 spiders at one sitting. Even if the spiders weren't tarantulas, that's more food than the shrimp special at Red Lobster.

There are two species of alligator lizard in the Bay Area, the Northern alligator lizard (*Elgaria coerulea*) and the Southern alligator lizard (*Elgaria multicarinata*). The Northern alligator lizard ranges along the coast from Big Sur to British Columbia. It's also found in northern Idaho and western Montana as well as in the Sierra Nevada. The Southern alligator lizard is found from Baja to southern Washington. Like the northern, it is largely absent from the Central Valley but does range into the Sierra Nevada. It's the species you'll find in the Coe Park. The Northern alligator lizard is found in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Peninsula, and even the East Bay hills, but not in the South Bay east of the Santa Clara Valley.

Southern Alligator Lizard, continued....

It may be too dry there to support the species, which is the most cold and moisture tolerant lizard in North America. If you live up the Peninsula or along the coast you may have seen Northern alligator lizards in your yard or even in your garage, for both species are habitat generalists that have adapted to suburbs where there's some natural habitat nearby. The two are similar in appearance although Southern alligator lizards show more rust coloring. Probably the best way to tell the two apart is to look at the eyes, which are pale yellow in the southern and brown in the northern.

In the Coe Park, Southern alligator lizards are common in a variety of habitats, with the possible exception of chaparral. Being habitat generalists has served alligator lizards well and both species appear to be doing fine throughout their range.

That's good news, not just for alligator lizards but for people. Alligator lizards, as it turns out, may help explain the low incidence of Lyme disease on the West Coast. Lyme disease is caused by a bacterium residing in the guts of black-legged ticks. Before attaining adult size and feasting on the blood of backpackers, young ticks—nymphs—must first get a blood meal from a much smaller animal such as a lizard. Alligator lizards possess a blood protein that kills the Lyme bacteria so that when an infected tick feeds on an alligator lizard the bacteria are destroyed before the tick reaches adulthood and attaches to people. As a result, there are far fewer cases of Lyme disease in California than in the Northeast where there are no alligator lizards and just one species of lizard overall. That blood protein was discovered several decades ago in Western fence lizards but it is also present in alligator lizards. Personally, I wish those blood proteins would go the extra mile and kill the tick itself not just the bacteria, but I'll take what I can get.

Another surprise benefit bestowed upon us by Southern alligator lizards is in auditory research. The inner ear of alligator lizards, surprisingly, is ideally suited for research on human hearing and has contributed to the development of better hearing aids.

Finally, of course, there is the contribution made by alligator lizards to pop culture. Those of you of a certain age may remember the song "Ventura Highway," which contained one of the strangest lines ever uttered in a pop song: "...alligator lizards in the air..." I thought it was one of those trippy LSD or peyote-induced non-sensical lyrics typical of the era. Alligator lizards can climb, swim, and grasp with their tails, but they can't fly. And while I never did get an answer regarding how large alligator lizards get I did learn the truth behind "Ventura Highway" and its flying lizards: the writer was describing what cloud formations resembled, not actual airborne lizards. In the end, Southern alligator lizards through their contributions to our understanding of the inner ear may just allow you to listen to "Ventura Highway" long after your hearing has been compromised. I'm taking that to be a good thing, but I suppose it's a matter of taste.



Alligator Lizard.
Photo by Joseph Belli.

From The Ponderosa 1980 (by Barry Breckling)

New park record: 16 inch Alligator Lizard seen along Madrone Soda Springs Creek by Barry. After standing still long enough to be measured, the lizard jumped into the creek and swam to the bottom. Maintenance man John Neef's story is even more unusual. While walking down Madrone Soda Springs Canyon with his wife Karen, they stopped to look at a lizard. It ran up John's leg on the inside of his pants leg of course. Shaking and jumping didn't dislodge the varmit, so John rolled up his pants and Karen grabbed the lizard by the tail. She removed the lizard but the tail broke off and as she was checking to see if the lizard was OK, it ran up her leg. John came to the rescue. This time when the lizard was put down they moved away quickly - and as they looked back - you guessed it, the lizard was coming after them.

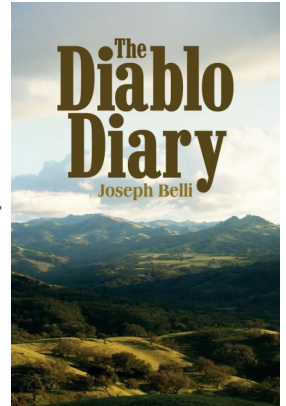
The Diablo Diary by Joseph Belli

By Libby Vincent

Joe Belli, a long-time Coe Park volunteer who writes articles on the creatures of Coe Park and the Diablo Range for each issue of The Ponderosa, has published his book The Diablo Diary. The book is a compilation of articles he has written over several years on his experiences in and the creatures of the Coast Range. This is terrific news for Joe, for supporters of Coe Park, for the Diablo Range, and for readers of The Ponderosa. The book is available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) in both paperback and Kindle versions. Wonderful photo on the cover too. Articles include:

Once There Were Bears
A Forest, One Tree at a Time
Where Have All The Foxes Gone

and many more. Lots of good reading ahead.



Paradise Lake

By Teddy Goodrich

Paradise Lake above Red Creek in the Orestimba Wilderness was one of the casualties of the heavy rainfall Coe Park experienced this past winter. The dam was breached the first weekend in March; there is still some water in the lake but for how long is unknown.

The dam was built by John Snodgrass in the 1920s to provide water for his cattle. He called it Red Creek Dam. The photo on the left shows John and his daughter, Maryjean, courtesy of Terry Anne, John's granddaughter. Apparently, 1932 was also a wet winter. Note the sandbags near the dam face. The photo on the right is the breached dam this spring, courtesy of Heather Ambler.

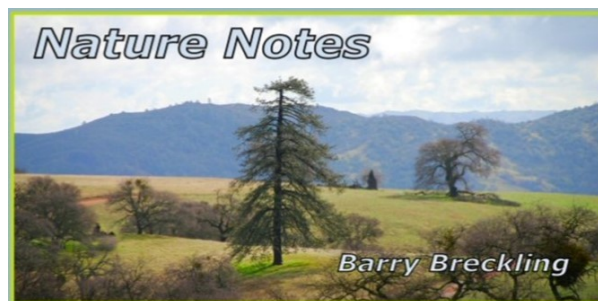


Red Creek Dam -
Dad & Maryjean 1932



Lions in the Sand

During an early morning walk, I came upon some deep conical pits in a sandy area. How strange! Some were 20 feet across and over 10 feet deep. I thought it would be fun to slide down into one and so I did. Bad idea. I tried to climb out but the sand kept sliding out from under my feet. Finally I reached the top edge, but suddenly I was bombarded with so much flying sand that I tumbled back to the bottom of the pit. As I began to climb back up, a set of large gnarly jaws grabbed me by the ankle and pulled me down under the sand. Fortunately, at that point I woke up. Wow, what a nightmare!



This dire scenario plays out all the time in real life. The victims are hapless ants and other small creatures that wander into the sand traps, and the monster at the bottom of the pit is an antlion, a savage predator.

Adult antlions are attractive, long-bodied, speckled-winged insects that resemble damselflies. Since the creatures fly mostly during the night, we're not likely to see them. The adult female lays eggs in sandy soil, and the eggs hatch into voracious larvae. The larvae construct cone-shaped traps in the soft soil by backing around in a circle, constantly flipping sand out of the deepening cone. Once the trap is completed, the larvae wait patiently underneath the bottom of the cone for an ant or another small creature to slide down the slope to their inevitable doom.

When a victim begins to lose its footing on the slippery slope of a pit, it struggles to make it back to the top, but the antlion flicks a barrage of sand at its prey, making escape all but impossible.

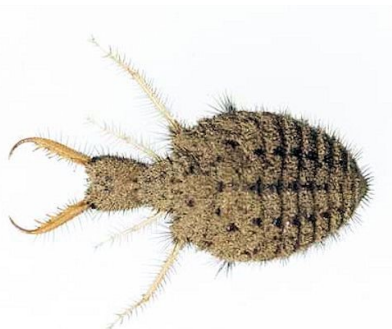
The antlion larva has bristly, sickle-shaped jaws that are perfectly designed to grab small prey and immediately inject it with paralyzing fluids. After it sucks the innards out of its prey, it tosses the carcass out of the cone.

Some people call antlions "doodlebugs." When they're not lurking under their cones of doom, they crawl around backward, leaving doodle-shaped tracks. Forward-facing hairs on their bodies prevent them from traveling forward, but the hairs help to anchor them in position when they're dragging creatures under the sand.

If an antlion larva is well fed, it can pupate and turn into a winged adult in a single year. Often, however, the antlion larvae go a long time between meals and spend the winter in a dormant state. Their low metabolic rate allows them to survive for long periods without food, and they can remain in a larval state for several years before they pupate.

California has more than 50 antlion species, and the larvae of most of the species are less than a quarter of an inch long. Some species, instead of creating cone traps in their larval stage, simply hang out in leaf litter waiting for prey.

If you find some little cone-shaped depressions in the sand, try tickling the edge of the cone with a pine needle or a blade of grass and see what happens. If you find some very large cone-shaped depressions, get the heck out of there.



The Rainy Season

By Gary Keller

“The rains continue, and since I last wrote the floods have been far worse than before.” While this opening sentence could have been written this last winter and spring by any of Coe Park rangers in their log books, it is actually the opening sentence in the chapter “The Rainy Season” in William Brewer’s book *Up and Down California in 1860-1864* in which he chronicles the great California flood of 1862.

Yes, it has been a wet winter and the current rainy season in California has officially surpassed the modern record set by the El Niño of 1982-83. Anyone who has ventured up to the park recently can attest to this fact by noting the abundance of mudslides, disappearing roadways, downed trees, and the fact that this past January the Pine Ridge visitor center recorded 17.75 inches of rain, the most rainfall in a single month since accurate rain record keeping began in 1976. Combine this with February’s 11.87 inch total and you end up with a two-month rain total of 29.62 inches—a season’s worth of rain!! With numbers like this it is easy to see why Anderson Reservoir was full and why Coyote Creek flooded in San Jose.

While Coe Park has certainly seen its share of rain this past winter, none of the storms was what you would call a megastorm. Megastorms are truly monster storms that last for days, deliver copious amounts of rain, and result in widespread flooding. Some examples of California megastorms in the past sixty years include the New Year’s Day storm of 1997, which hit the central Sierra and inundated much of Yosemite Valley. Others are the February 1986 storm that flooded many parts of Northern California, the great Christmas flood of 1964 which resulted in record flooding along the Eel River, and perhaps the most notorious megastorm of the last half of the 20th century, the deadly Christmas deluge of 1955 (a.k.a. storm of the century) that flooded much of Yuba City and resulted in thirty seven deaths. This last storm set many single day rainfall records in central California that stand to this day.

Though California has witnessed many extreme rain events in the past, none can compare to the great winter flood of 1861-1862. This was by far the greatest recorded flood event ever to strike California and as mentioned above is well documented in William Brewer’s journals. Like all great California floods, this one followed a familiar pattern: a heavy Sierra snowpack laid down during the early winter months of November and December followed by warm, atmospheric rivers (also known as the pineapple express) sweeping in from the Pacific. It was this scenario that played out in California (and much of the western United States) in January of 1862. So intense and unrelenting were these storms and rainfall that the Central Valley was transformed into a giant inland sea 300 miles long and 20 miles wide with water depths of up to 30 feet. Many climatologists would label the 1862 rain event as a 500 year flood, but geologic evidence suggests that California has endured even greater mega floods long before Europeans arrived in California. Analysis of sediment deposits from San Francisco Bay and the Santa Barbara channel indicate such extreme weather events occur in California every 200 to 300 years.

While we will never know the exact amount of rain that fell on Coe Park in January of 1862, interpretation of San Francisco rain records would put it in the range of 30 to 40 inches. Compared to the paltry 17 inches of rain the park received this past January we can only imagine the torrents of water that raged down Coyote Creek through the Narrows and China Hole in 1862.

Can such a rain event as the 1862 floods happen again in California? Like our other big one (earthquakes), the answer is most certainly yes, but predicting when is where the science gets fuzzy. Predicting California winter rains is like rolling dice; sometimes the result is drought (like the past five years) or very wet, like this past winter. And every once in a very great while the weather dice serve up rain beyond all comprehension, as in 1862.

Continued on page 16....

The Oak-Loving Birds of Henry W. Coe State Park

By Carolyn Straub

Steve McHenry and I have been birders for twenty years and take field guides, binoculars, and a spotting scope everywhere. The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society has a quirky way of summing up the bird scene with “the usual suspects” when birders arrive at a birding spot—that is, the birds they expect to see are present.



There are also “suspect” birds—birds that you hope to see—at Coe Park, perhaps because they favor the oak trees. Take the Nuttall’s Woodpecker, the only local woodpecker with a ladder, or striped, back. They are confined to California’s oak woodlands but don’t eat acorns. They are also identified by a rapid drilling noise as they poke for bugs.

Nuttall’s Woodpecker, © Glen Tepke

Another endemic, or native, bird that loves the California oaks is the Oak Titmouse. Its “peter-peter-peter” whistle is high and sharp. If you look closely through the oak leaves, you might see this small creature with a distinctive gray crest on its head hopping about hunting for insects. It’s a gray bird, not fancy, but it’s exclusive to oak trees.



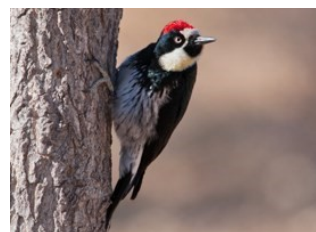
Oak Titmouse, © Susanne Meyer



In spring you might also see pairs of Western Bluebirds, which are readily identified by a rusty “necklace.” The male is brilliant blue while the female’s blue color and necklace are fainter. They prefer to nest in tree holes and are busy little birds easily seen around the campground at the visitor center. They don’t mind oaks at all.

Male Western Bluebird, © Jamie Chavez

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention one of our most raucous birds, the Acorn Woodpecker with its peculiar “laughing” voice. It’s a sociable woodpecker and can be seen around dead oak snags. Acorn Woodpeckers live in family communities and drill holes up and down trunks and along large branches of trees. They store acorns for the winter in these so-called “granary” trees. There are granary trees along Manzanita Point Road and throughout the oak forests of Coe. It’s said that these birds can remember where they stored their acorns and can find the granaries again come the cold season.



Acorn Woodpecker, © Stephen Ramirez



Last but not the least of the oak-loving birds of Coe Park is the White-breasted Nuthatch. It has a habit of hopping head first down oak trees, finding insects or jamming nuts and acorns into the tree to peck out the seeds. It has a loud voice so its “yammering” will lead you to its hideout in the branches.

White-breasted Nuthatch, © Jim Paris

If you would like to learn more, these and other birds are featured on All About Birds, a website of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/>.

Pick up a field guide, binoculars if you have them, head out, have fun, and happy birding!

Hike with the Henry Coe State Park Outdoors Meetup Group

By Heather Ambler

Over the past year several hikes have been offered through the Coe Park Meetup group. All hikes are led by Coe Park uniformed volunteers who want to share their knowledge of the park they know and love. Some hikes are strenuous, real calorie-burners, others are more gentle and emphasize discovering the beauty and charms of Coe Park.

Wildflower hikes are very popular; regular hikes are hosted on weekends during the busy spring season. These hikes leave from the visitor center at the end of East Dunne Avenue, Morgan Hill.

A recent mid-week hike offered from the Hunting Hollow entrance specifically to see the wildflowers that favor the serpentine areas along Steer Ridge was a huge success. Visitors hiked up the nicely aligned Jim Donnelly Trail to Steer Ridge and on to the serpentine rock area near Willson Peak. All along the way, volunteers shared information about the many flowers, trees, and even mountain lion tracks that we saw in the dried-up mud on the ridge. The flowers in the serpentine area were out of this world and probably near their peak. The sweet smell of birds-eye gilia filled the air; goldfields, poppies, and cream cups covered the otherwise barren and rocky hill top, and we even saw a jewel flower. One visitor said after the hike: "Thank you for leading an awesome hike. I am going to be happy for many, many days."

More hikes are coming up so please join us at: <https://www.meetup.com/Henry-Coe-State-Park-Outdoors-Meetup/>. I look forward to seeing you on the trail!

Social Media Outreach

By Michael Hundt

We are trying to interest many more people in Coe Park by using social media tools like Facebook and Meetup:

<https://www.meetup.com/Henry-Coe-State-Park-Outdoors-Meetup/>

As of March 2017, we have 714 members signed on to our Coe Meetup. We have organized over a dozen hikes, walks, and talks so far this year and people who attend are very enthusiastic about the activities we have presented. We have another ten events scheduled right now at the peak of the wildflower season. We need to let others know how well these outings have been received: "A very nice hike and I learned a lot about the trees in the park." (Harvey).

Nature presentations offered to Meetup members

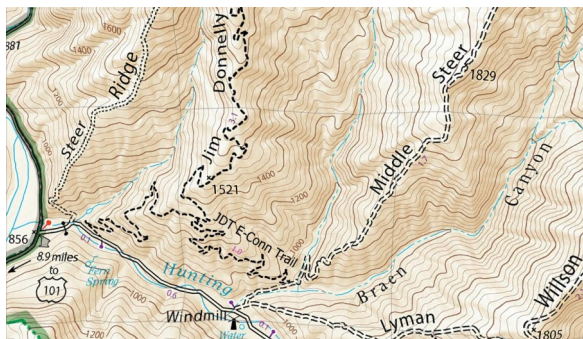
This year we have tried to interest more people in Coe Park by offering a series of nature presentations on large prey and predators. We have had sessions on birds all along but now offer Mountain Lion and Tule Elk presentations in the interpretive room at the visitor center. Initial attendance has been good with very enthusiastic responses to these sessions: "Fantastic !! Great presentation!! Thank you Michael!" (Michaelia).

We plan to offer repeat presentations during the year and expand to include Coyotes, Black Tailed Deer and Owls in the near future.

Please volunteer to present a session on your favorite creature or assist with a current presentation. Contact Mike Hundt for support and ideas (mdmhundt@pacbell.net).

Jim Donnelly East Connector Trail is now open

By Sue Dekalb



Before the realignment of the Jim Donnelly Trail (JDT), the start of the JDT went straight up the steep hillside from the bottom of Middle Steer Ridge Trail. Unless you were a fearless hiker or a mountain biker heading downhill, it was not a very desirable trail to use. The realignment brought the bottom of the JDT to Hunting Hollow Road between creek crossings one and two.

Part of the realignment project was to make a connector trail from the bottom of Middle Steer Ridge Trail back up to the realigned JDT near the original trail's path. This new trail called the JDT East Connector, or E-Conn for short, starts one mile up the JDT from Hunting Hollow Road. It is a nice 10 percent grade through the oaks and runs one mile back down to Middle Steer Ridge Trail.

One thing Coe was lacking at the Hunting Hollow entrance was a nice short loop trail. The E-Conn is about half shade with oaks and the rest is grassy hillsides with many wildflowers. This trail gives you a great loop with some awesome views of Hunting Hollow.

We don't often get new trails (or improved old ones) in Coe because there is no dedicated trail crew for the park. The trail crew for the Monterey District spends most of their time at other parks so we depend on volunteer labor to keep our trails brushed and maintained. We also have to do most, if not all, our trail work by hand as we have no dedicated Sweco (trail building tool) operator.

There is a small group of volunteers at Coe who enjoy building trails and we all worked on the E-Conn. Starting in late January of 2016, we spent two months cutting the pilot bench (basically a one foot path to show where the trail would go). In April 2016 after the pilot bench work was approved, we started building the full bench. The full bench in this case is a four foot wide solid trail including many passing zones and drainages. We completed the full bench in November 2016 but because we had such a wet winter we were unable to open the trail until April 14, 2017 (exactly one year after we started working on the full bench).

All of the work on the trail was done by hand with picks, shovels, wheelbarrows, and hoes. Sometimes it rained and other times it was close to 100 degrees but the trail work continued. Paul even figured out how to put brakes on our wheelbarrows so they wouldn't get away from us when we hauled dirt downhill. Unlike other trails I have worked on, all the dirt from this trail was used to build the passing zones. No dirt was pushed over the side.



This trail would not have been possible if it hadn't been for Paul Liebenberg's great leadership and guidance. We had a trail work day every Thursday (and sometimes Tuesdays) until the project was completed. Paul spent many other days fine tuning the drainages on his own. Hopefully I won't leave anyone out, but the trail crew consisted of Paul Liebenberg, Art Pon, Dan Healy, Don Clare, Ken Hulick, Allene Liebenberg, Mike Meyer, Kelly Kersten, Jodie and Linda Keahey, Lynne Starr, Jim Wright, Travis Taylor, Daniel Scott, Rick Casey, Ed Fox, and Sue Dekalb.

I am sure that the JDT E-Conn will be a very popular loop. I plan to ride my horse there as often as I can. The next time you are down in the Hunting Hollow area be sure to check out this wonderful new addition to the park. Hopefully you will appreciate all the hard work that went into making this trail as you hike, bike, or ride down this great trail.

News from the Board of the Pine Ridge Association

By Dan Benefiel, President, PRA Board

The board of the Pine Ridge Association met on March 14, 2017. The agenda included the financial report (Cynthia Leeder), volunteer committee updates (Manny Pitta), Gilroy Yamato Hot Springs updates (Robert Method), and an update from the Monterey District (Ranger David Hermitte).

Daniel noted that the board had approved in a unanimous email vote the purchase of two wheelbarrows for \$200 plus tax.

The board voted in favor of a proposal from Manny to upgrade www.coepark.net. The current website is based on an old version of its content management system, Joomla, and is suffering from frequent breakage and security problems. The new website will have a similar look and feel and will be hosted by SiteGround.

The board noted that Coe Park will celebrate 60 years in 2018 and we would like to begin planning events to recognize this. Peter Verbica and Adam Escoto will work on publicizing it. The board also noted that this occasion brings new urgency to sprucing up the visitor center area.

The board updated status of projects authorized in 2016:

- The full park relief map and tablet-based 3D model projects are still planned to move forward, but work has slowed for various reasons. We hope to be able to get it going again.
- Endangered Animals coloring books have been printed and received.
- Daniel Benefiel, Teddy Goodrich, Patricia Clark-Gray, Interpretive Specialist, Mike Zuccarro, and David Price, Graphic Designer, planned met on April 3 at Coe Park to look at location and other options for a panel showing the peaks of the Quien Sabe Volcanic Field south of the park.
- The board has authorized the purchase of new audiovisual equipment for use in the interpretive room; Ranger John Verhoeven is considering options.

The board discussed the status of white barn donations. Cynthia Leeder, treasurer, noted that \$5000 from an anonymous donor is still available and that they approved use of those funds for other structures such as the visitor center which is sorely in need of maintenance.

The board is discussing a proposal to create a database of PRA and non-PRA contacts and use a service such as Mail Chimp to send news, event notifications, and support requests periodically. This would be a way to reach out especially to nonmembers, maintain their interest in the park, draw them to events, encourage them to become members, and have them available as resources when appropriate. This new communication effort will not be replacing the quarterly Ponderosa newsletter. Please let me know if you're interested in working on this project.

The board meets bimonthly at 6:30pm at the Gilroy Public Library. All PRA members are welcome to attend. The next meetings will be held on Tuesday May 9th and Tuesday July 11th.

Volunteer Ron Erskine and the Necessity of Wilderness, continued....

In conclusion, it should come as no surprise that Ron is still busy volunteering. He currently serves as the President of the Board of Directors of the Committee for Green Foothills, which was co-founded by Wallace Stegner in 1962 and advocates for open space in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties. And you can follow his most recent hiking adventures by picking up a Morgan Hill Times or Gilroy Dispatch and reading his regular column "Getting Out." For the years of service Ron has devoted to Coe Park, on behalf of the PRA board and scores of park volunteers we can only pass along our most sincere thanks and, better yet, something more practical, such as some fresh trail mix or beef jerky for Ron's next hike.

News from the Volunteer Committee

By Manny Pita, Chair, Volunteer Committee

With the close of 2016 and PRA annual meeting activities settled, the volunteer committee turned its attention to upcoming spring events. With the busy wildflower season approaching, the committee discussed ideas to entice more volunteers to staff the headquarters visitor center. One consideration was that some volunteers enjoyed talking with park visitors but were not comfortable using the cash registers. Having volunteers stationed outside the visitor center to interact with visitors would ease the crowding inside and take care of visitors who only had questions and needed information. We will monitor the effectiveness of serving visitors this way and also of the plan's ability to attract more volunteers to visitor center duty.

Spring activities ramped up in March and continued through April. Wildflower walks have been well attended with many of the events organized on Meetup.com filling up. Bird watching and nature journaling were also offered, including a nature journaling weekend. Talks and hikes covering tule elk, mountain lions, oak trees and acorns, and more were offered throughout March and April. Earth Day was also very well attended and all available parking spaces at the visitor center and the entrance parking lot were filled. Coe volunteers also conducted Earth Day activities at Hunting Hollow and at Fremont Peak. More events are planned through June. See the Coe Activities Calendar at coepark.net:

<http://coepark.net/pineridgeassociation/programs-events/eventcalendar>

Outreach events are continuing through the spring, generating awareness in the community and continuing to fill the parking lots. A Coe Park booth was staffed during events at San Jose State and Stanford University.

The rain-delayed volunteer training ride-along rescheduled to April 1st and 2nd was again postponed because of rain and the condition of park roads. We are now targeting for June 3rd and 4th. All volunteers will be invited to join the activity at Pacheco Camp to greet the new volunteers and be acknowledged for their hard work during the busy spring events.

Casual volunteer shirts were offered for sale from March 27-April 3. The online sale offered a men's sport shirt, women's sport shirt, and short sleeve and long sleeve T-shirts. All shirts were 100 percent polyester and in Vegas Gold with State Park logos and "Volunteer Henry W. Coe State Park" silkscreened in blue.

Volunteer committee meetings are held bi-monthly on the first Wednesday. Everyone is welcome to join us. The next two meetings will be on July 5th and September 6th. Contact any volunteer committee member for details.

In Memoriam-Dave Flack

By Libby Vincent

Long-time Coe Park volunteer Dave Flack has died. Dave's daughter wrote: "It is with great sadness that I share the news that my father has died. The treatments were not working and he was increasingly uncomfortable with the intrusive nature of all that entailed. He requested, and the family agreed, to withdraw further treatment. He was surrounded by loved ones. The world has lost an amazing man who touched many with his sense of humor, generosity, and intelligence. Thank you again for all the love, support, and prayers."



This news is a shock to all of us who knew Dave through his years as a volunteer. He was an irrepressible presence at volunteer events and had us in fits of giggles with his wonderfully dry sense of humor. Our heartfelt condolences to Dave's wife Patti and his family. Go in peace, Dave.

Park Events and Information

Please visit www.coepark.net for the most current information about all upcoming Coe activities and events under the Upcoming Events section on the home page.

New PRA Members

We are pleased to welcome the new members listed below. Thank you for your support.

Karl Doll, Sunnyvale
Kris Karnos

John and Donna Mracek, Cupertino
Carol Fredrickson and Jim Conley, Morgan Hill

We need your help to keep our membership list current and accurate. If you have any questions regarding your membership or to let us know of any change of address, please contact us. If you have chosen to receive The Ponderosa electronically and, for some reason, it is undeliverable, we will send the next issue via U.S. mail

Email: membership@coepark.net
U.S. mail: 9100 East Dunne Avenue, Morgan Hill, CA 95037
<http://coepark.net/pineridgeassociation/join>

PRA Annual Meeting, Continued....

Supervising Ranger Stuart Organo provided some updates. He said "We have had some torrential down-pours. There was damage everywhere, with rockslides, mudslides, and trees down." He thanked the equestrian and bike patrols for helping find and report damage. He said that former Monterey District Superintendent Mat Fuzie has left the district and his replacement is Brentwood Marshall. Brent came to the district from Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area where he was the District Superintendent for five years. "We are very glad to have him on board," said Ranger Stuart. He said that Coe Park also had a new maintenance employee on staff, Rick Hentges.

A delicious hot lunch was provided at the end of the meeting. Many thanks to the volunteers who worked hard in the kitchen preparing all that good food.

Congratulations to everyone!

Rainy Season, Continued....

For readers who want to dig more deeply into California's climate and extreme weather events, the following hyperlinks lead to several websites that deal with this subject. Of particular interest are the Wikipedia and Scientific American articles, both of which describe the 1861-1862 flood event in great detail:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Flood_of_1862

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/atmospheric-rivers-california-mega-flood-lessons-from-forgotten-catastrophe/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floods_in_California

Coe Park rainfall records from 1976 to present: <http://coepark.net/pineridgeassociation/planning-your-visit/weather-at-coe-park/rainfall>

William Brewer's book *Up and Down California in 1860-1864* is available in various digital formats (Kindle, PDF, EPUB, etc.): <https://archive.org/details/updowncalifornia01will>.

News from Gilroy Yamato Hot Springs

By Laura Dominguez-Yon

We love the rain: the water running in Coyote Creek, the hillsides green and lush, and all the wildflowers now in bloom! But there are downsides to the winter storms—flooded roads, downed trees, mud and rock slides. And this year, something more: a collapsed road that prevents us from entering Gilroy Yamato Hot Springs (GYHS).

James Denoyer, a State Parks employee who works at Point Lobos and lives in the camp host site at GYHS, first noticed the cracks in the road on Thursday morning, February 9th when he was leaving for work. On Sunday February 12th the road had dropped about three feet. A week later it had dropped an additional six feet. James was able to borrow an electric cart to shuttle his equipment between his truck and his home, a quarter mile apart and separated by the collapsed section of road. The cart barely fitted on the narrow strip of road that remained. Fortunately, the county road crew was able to fill in the gap by March 19th and top it with gravel before more rain caused the road to slip again. Cracks appeared, and the road dropped a couple of feet again.

On Saturday, April 22nd California State Parks Foundation volunteers join GYHS volunteers for “Laura’s birthday volunteer work day party” to clear winter overgrowth and underbrush in preparation for the upcoming annual public event. The nineteen volunteers were rewarded by seeing the improvements to the road and by lunch with birthday cupcakes and a tour of the restoration progress. Uniformed volunteers Sue DeKalb, Robert Method, Dan Healey, Dean Yon, Stu Nuttall, Keiko Yamada Olson, and Dan Olson worked alongside the other volunteers and were on hand to ensure that all went well.

The Monday restoration team received a donation of safety harnesses and ropes with storage buckets from Avixi, Inc. Avixi president Marie Hunter had seen the need for the equipment and generously donated it.

The annual public event this year is “Women of Gilroy Hot Springs” and is scheduled for Saturday May 20th from 9:00-4:30. Have you wondered who these women were? Some were owners of land, some were visitors, and some lived and worked at GYHS. Learn stories about them! Admission is \$15/person over age 12 and includes parking on site. Bring a picnic, bring your friends, and spend some time relaxing with us. Guided tours will be offered throughout the day along with exhibits, activities, and entertainment. No cost for uniformed volunteers.

RSVP, please. If the road repair isn’t completed we may have to postpone the event.



Robert Method thanks Marie Hunter with a handshake while Cliff Andersen, Barney Shiroyam, J.J. Sasaki, and Dan Healey look on.

Photo by Laura Dominguez-Yon.



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The Ponderosa is a quarterly publication of the Pine Ridge Association. The PRA's mission is to enhance and enrich the public's experience at Henry W. Coe State Park through education and interpretation. Articles and artwork relating to the natural history, history, and management of the park are welcome. Also, interested in volunteering? Email Manny Pitta, mannypitta@gmail.com.

Please send submissions and ideas to the editor at: PRAnewsletter3@gmail.com

Deadline for the next issue: July 31, 2017

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