



# ACCESS ADVENTURE

## *Challenging the Limits of Disability*

Spring 2006

Volume 1, Number 1



*“Climb the mountains  
and get their good  
tidings. Nature’s peace  
will flow into you as  
sunshine flows into  
trees. The winds will  
blow their freshness  
into you, and the  
storms their energy,  
while cares will drop  
off like autumn leaves.”*

**John Muir**



Susan Hassett and  
Ruth Benton at Dutra Ranch  
Muir Heritage Land Trust



### **Mission Statement:**

To provide wilderness and open space access for people with disabilities using innovative, accessible horse-drawn carriages.

### **A Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins With a Single Step**

John Muir’s great-grandson is blazing a new trail into the wilderness, opening a path to be traveled by people with disabilities. Fairfield horseman, Michael Muir, 54, has lived with multiple sclerosis since he was 15 years old. Muir credits his active life working horses and in nature with keeping him strong. Refusing to be daunted by the relentless course of his disease, Muir believes in challenging the limits of disability. In 2001, he led an international team of people with disabilities driving wheelchair accessible horse drawn carriages on a 3,000 mile, ten-month Journey Across America, from Mission San Diego to Washington DC. With more than seven thousand miles in seven countries (and counting) the extraordinary experiences of HorseJourney have led to the founding of Access Adventure. Muir says, “We have shown that people with disabilities can accomplish amazing things. Horses, combined with innovative adaptive equipment are the links that carry us back into a close relationship with nature and wild places. I know how important this has proven to be in my own life and it is something I want to share with others.”

### **Muir Heritage Land Trust**

When Michael Muir was looking to extend the reach of Access Adventure, it was natural to look across the Carquinez Straight to the Muir Heritage Land Trust in Contra Costa County. “My family and I are delighted to support the Muir Heritage Land Trust, which honors the memory and life’s work of my great-grandfather. His pioneering vision to preserve and protect wild places is carried on by the Land Trust today. Their generous offer to host Access Adventure as a user group on the spectacular properties they protect is a good fit for all of us,” says Muir. Access Adventure offers monthly carriage driving events on **Muir Heritage Land Trust** and **Solano Land Trust** properties from April through October each year, serving the community of people with disabilities in the Greater Bay Area. For information please contact [info@muirheritagelandtrust.org](mailto:info@muirheritagelandtrust.org) or [www.muirheritagelandtrust.org](http://www.muirheritagelandtrust.org)

### **Rush Ranch Open House, Saturday, April 29**

The 2,070 acre Rush Ranch serves as the program headquarters for Access Adventure. The property straddles the northeastern edge of the Suisun Marsh, with about half of the acreage in brackish tidal marsh land. This land makes up part of the largest remaining estuarine marshland in North America, an environmentally sensitive area that is home to many rare and endangered plants and animals. Rush Ranch was acquired by the **Solano Land Trust** in 1988, with a grant from the State Coastal Conservancy.

Rush Ranch is located about two miles south of Highway 12, and Suisun City, on Grizzly Island Road. It is currently open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 8:00 a.m. until dusk. The ranch has three hiking trails and ample areas to explore with the horsedrawn carriages of Access Adventure. There are several hills that provide wonderful views over the wetlands, the surrounding countryside and Mount Diablo. It is a great place to come for birding, and the wildflower show is spectacular in the spring.

Don’t miss the **Rush Ranch Open House, April 29 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.** Access Adventure will introduce a new wheelchair accessible carriage and a horsedrawn trolley with rides available to tour the ranch. Draft horses will demonstrate traditional farming methods from days of yore, with blacksmithing, sheep dog trials, Native American history, food and fun for the whole family. You are invited to come learn more about this treasured Solano County resource, and the driving programs of Access Adventure. For information contact [info@SolanoLandTrust.org](mailto:info@SolanoLandTrust.org) or [www.SolanoLandTrust.org](http://www.SolanoLandTrust.org).

# ACCESS ADVENTURE

Page 2 of 3



*Michael Muir and Cindy Goff  
in a Thornlea Carriage on  
The 1,000 Mile Journey  
To the Gulf*



*Rush Ranch  
Solano Land Trust*

*“Everybody needs beauty  
as well as bread,  
places to play in  
and pray in, where  
nature may heal  
and give strength to  
body and soul.”  
John Muir*



*Steely Dan and  
Jill Hokanson*

## **Two New Carriages for Access Adventure**

Jerry and Barbara Garner of Wabash, Indiana are long-time supporters of carriage driving for the disabled. They are avid drivers, breeders of the well-known Thornlea Ponies, and designer/builder of the innovative Thornlea Carriages, the industry standard for accessible horsedrawn vehicles. Jerry has incorporated a battery operated lift that can accommodate up to 500 pounds to lift aboard people with mobility problems, including those in wheelchairs. A simple lockdown device secures the wheelchair in place so that people living with mobility challenges can be carried anywhere a horsedrawn carriage can go. The world becomes a bigger place, with the pleasure of being out in the wilderness accessible to everyone.

Working with Access Adventure, Jerry has designed two new vehicles for the growing program. The first, a traditional four-wheel carriage can accommodate four passengers, including two in wheelchairs. The second is a unique trolley design that can carry up to twelve people, including up to five wheelchairs. This expanded capacity will allow Access Adventure to meet the growing demand for recreational carriage driving, while keeping larger groups together for longer driving times. These new vehicles will also serve to carry people with disabilities on the Wilderness Wagon Trains. Jerry and Barbara are delivering the new carriages to California for the Rush Ranch Open House, and will take part in the Wildflower Wagon Train in the Los Padres National Forest.

## **Thank You Volunteers!**

The Access Adventure Driving Program is staffed entirely by volunteers drawn from the Northern California equestrian community, and local supporters with a variety of useful skills to help provide wilderness and open space access to people with disabilities. We started July 2005 after orientation and training sessions for prospective carriage drivers and evaluations of their driving horses for suitability to use in the program. Our volunteers typically commit to one day of driving per month for an Access Adventure scheduled event. Our hats are off to these dedicated volunteers. We couldn't do this important work without them! Special thanks to:

**Our Carriage Drivers:** Ann Breznock, Winters, Susan Hassett, Winters, Jill Hokanson, Shingle Springs, Deena Kirby, Acampo, and John Walker, Vallejo.

**Our Groom/Rider Assistants:** Cathy O'Shea, Suisun City, Dennis Maddox, Vacaville, Randie Boardman, Fairfield, and Jim Carr, Fairfield.

**Our Wagonmaster:** Bud Blankenship, Stockton.

**Our Program Assistant:** Mary Lou Fazel, Orinda.

## **Spotlight on Susan Hassett**

Susan Hassett, from the Buzzard's Roost Ranch near Winters, CA has been a volunteer with Access Adventure since its inception. Susan drove her team of Belgian mares for the 2005 Rush Ranch Open House and was on hand for the training and orientation sessions leading up to the opening of Access Adventure in July 2005. She enjoys competing in driving events with her Morgan stallion Triton Osage, and operates a commercial carriage business, in addition to her "real job" as a computer trainer and consultant. A retired firefighter, Susan sees Access Adventure as a way to continue helping people in need. She says, "I like exposing people to the horses, which seem to have a special intuitive gentleness around people with disabilities. We couldn't do this without the horses!"

## **And a Salute to Our Hardworking Driving Horses**

Access Adventure doesn't yet maintain a stable of driving horses to serve the program, but depends on volunteers with suitably experienced horses to work when needed. We have a variety of driving horses to draw on, including Morgans, Standardbreds, Belgians, Percherons, Stonewall Sporthorses and cross-breds. They come in different sizes and colors, but share a gentle, reliable nature and a good work ethic. These stalwart workhorses are the backbone of Access Adventure.

## **Spotlight on Steely Dan**

Steely Dan is a 10 year old Tennessee Walking Horse gelding owned by Jill Hokanson since his birth. From the beginning he has been schooled to be primarily a carriage horse, but he is also a very reliable and entertaining saddle horse. He has made friends throughout California, Nevada, and Arizona, giving carriage rides, traveling on wagon trains and soliciting gifts of carrots wherever he goes! Dan is also an amusing addition to local schools in their fourth grade California history curriculum, giving living history demonstrations of Wagon Train encampments. On wagon trains, however, Dan is skilled at untying knots or removing his halter or bridle, and he is sometimes found searching the wagons for lunches, or walking into other people's horse trailers as if he was ready to go for a ride somewhere. While stealing lunches can be a problem, Dan is a funny, happy horse and we very much enjoy the carriage rides at Access Adventure.

## **Special Events**

April 29

May 4-7

June 10

June 17 - 25

July 29 - August 6

October 7 - 15

Rush Ranch Open House and "Plow and Play Day"

"The Wildflower Wagon Train" through Ft. Hunter Liggett

Fernandez Ranch Celebration with Muir Heritage Land Trust

"Fandango Pass Wagon Train" Ft. Bidwell to Clear Lake Wildlife Refuge

"Lost Coast Wagon Train" Mendocino County

"Fandango II Wagon Train"

# ACCESS ADVENTURE

## The Wildflower Wagon Train, May 4 through May 7

A dazzling show of spring wildflowers in one of California's most pristine oak woodlands will greet the riders on the Wildflower Wagon Train. An added bonus will be a visit to the Mission San Antonio de Padua, the only California Mission remaining in its original natural setting. There has been no modern development in the area surrounding this historic Spanish Mission, located within the confines of Fort Hunter Liggett near the Los Padres National Forest. San Antonio offers a breathtaking glimpse of the rugged California first encountered by the Spaniards. Surrounded by magnificent oaks, the mission sits in the middle of a vast meadow in a remote valley where cougars, wild turkeys and rattlesnakes thrive. In 1805, the mission was home to two padres, five soldiers and 1,300 Salinan Native Americans.

Anyone is welcome to join the **Wilderness Wagon Trains** of Access Adventure. You may bring your own carriage or wagon, book space as a passenger, join as a mounted outrider or serve as support crew under the direction of veteran wagon master Bud Blankenship. Bud led the historic Bicentennial Wagon Train with a record 96 horsedrawn vehicles. Meals will be catered from the chuck wagon operated by Susan Walker and Sumner Nash from Stagecoach, Nevada and Cedarville, CA. There is a share of the cost assessed to each participant to cover insurance, permits and fees, with scholarships available to people with disabilities. Space is limited. Don't miss this unique opportunity to explore one of California's most scenic wild places.



Journey Across America

## Goal for 2006

Our goal is to raise \$20,000 this year to fund the needs of our rapidly growing program:

Two new Thornlea carriages, delivered.....	\$13,750
Insurance, est. ....	\$ 2,500
Special Events costs.....	\$ 2,000

### Please Help!

**Consider a donation to fund the work of Access Adventure. Your contribution helps provide wilderness and open space access for people with disabilities. Checks made payable to Solano Land Trust with the notation "Access Adventure" are tax deductible.**

We are grateful to the generous donors that fund the work of Access Adventure. Many thanks to these recent contributors (as of February 28, 2006)!

Anonymous.....	\$ 5,000
Drs. Gene and Ann Breznock, Winters, CA.....	\$ 1,000
Ruth Benton, Fairfield, CA.....	\$ 1,000
Sheryl Venton, Petaluma, CA.....	\$ 1,000
Michael Muir, Fairfield, CA.....	\$ 250
Visually Impaired Group of Fairfield, CA.....	\$ 100

**In Memory of John Curletto:** Thank you to **Stella Curletto** of Martinez, CA who donated a road cart built by her late husband, John. John was an avid collector, builder and restorer of horsedrawn vehicles. We appreciate Stella's generous gift in John's memory, to Access Adventure.

**Overbrook Farm**, Lexington, Kentucky, one of the leading thoroughbred breeding farms in the world has donated stallion seasons.

**HorseJourney and the Stonewall Trust** have donated a warmblood filly by German stallion Atlantis from the Journey Across America mare Stonewall Scarlet, and an Amish wheelchair cart.

**Hubbard's Horse Transport**, Riverside, CA contributes shipping at cost.

### Sign Up for Access Adventure!

The regular programs of Access Adventure are open without charge to anyone living with mobility challenges, after medical clearance to participate. To obtain an application, please contact our office.



Rush Ranch  
Solano Land Trust

Each month we offer recreational carriage driving events at Solano Land Trust and Muir Heritage Land Trust Properties



Driving at Dutra Ranch  
Muir Heritage Land Trust

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**  
Events Coordinator  
Fundraising Coordinator  
Grant Writer  
Webmaster

### Access Adventure

Michael Muir, Director  
1001 Texas St.  
Suite C  
Fairfield, CA 94533

Phone:  
(707) 432-0150 ext. 0

Fax:  
(707) 432-0151

E-Mail:  
[info@access-adventure.org](mailto:info@access-adventure.org)

Coming soon  
[www.access-adventure.org](http://www.access-adventure.org)