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## No holding him back

Posted on January 20, 2006

Last weekend at the annual meeting of the NorCal Driving Club, we had a visit from our old friend, Michael Muir. Readers may remember Michael as the force behind the Horse Journey Across America, wherein several wheelchair-accessible carriages were driven from San Diego to the White House in Washington, D.C. That journey and the subsequent trip from Indiana to the Gulf of Mexico were undertaken to draw attention to and support for equine programs for disabled people.



Michael, the great-grandson of John Muir, has suffered from MS since he was 15 and has spent his life ignoring the affliction to achieve things even able-bodied folks find daunting. The two horse journeys are just examples of his determination. Over his lifetime he has bred and trained racehorses, and his show horses have won championships around the world. When the disease rendered him no longer able to ride, he taught himself to drive pairs and teams of horses and has won carriage-driving championships in this country as well as in Europe.

Michael visited us at the Northern California Driving Club to tell us about his latest endeavors with the Muir Land Trust and the Rush Ranch/Solano Land Trust. These land trusts and Michael's experiences have come together to provide overland wilderness adventures to the disabled of the region. Participants are given the unique opportunity to witness our preserved wilderness areas and lovely vistas in wheelchair-accessible carriages almost every weekend.

The Muir Land Trust includes over 2,000 acres of preserved wilderness areas that include the Dutra Ranch and other ranches from the Hercules area down the ridges to the Muir Historic National Site in Martinez. The Solano land trust consists of the Rush Ranch, Paradise Valley, Lynch Canyon and other properties, preserves, and conservation easements totaling over 6,000 acres under land trust management. These two land trust management areas are more or less across the Suisun Straits from each other and make wonderful day-trip destinations for anyone – equestrian or otherwise.

Rush Ranch in particular has a very active program of hiking and bird/wildlife watching. There are docent programs for school classes that deal with not only the history and geography of the area but the wildlife,



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the food chain needs and the lifestyles and skills of the early settlers of the region. The Muir Land trust on our side of the river also offers school programs, hiking adventures and equestrian access as weather and season permit.

In these days of dwindling open space access for us equestrians, it is exciting to hear of these wonderful land trust opportunities. Additional information can be found at Web sites for each of the trusts. Just google Michael Muir, Solano Land Trust or Muir Land Trust. These treasures exist in our own back yards for everyone and they provide opportunities to learn, to recreate, to volunteer and to support.

In April, when Michael's carriage ride program starts up again, I'm sure that there will be members of the NCDC volunteering their critters and rigs!

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