

# POINT REYES LIGHT

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Potholes in Bolinas are sometimes dug by residents trying to slow drivers. Photo by Plotkin,

## Fixing potholes raises wrath of pro-slow locals

by Justin Nobel

Driving the Bolinas Mesa, rocks smack the undercarriage, dubs get dinged and unkept bushes scrape paint.

The unpaved roads are neglected not only because fixing them is costly, but also because some people like them in a state of disrepair. Dilapidated roads thrash cars and stymie ambulances but they also slow down and prevent traffic, a welcome effect in a town where kids and pets wander freely. Pro-potholers say bumpy roads keep people away but local real estate agents say that newcomers are actually attracted to Bolinas's bump-

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## Dogs that think they are sheep

by Jacoba Charles

Since the first sheep ranchers arrived in West Marin more than a century ago they have been battling coyotes. They've used guns, snares, and poison – as well as barns, fences, and dogs. Some used strychnine until it was outlawed in the 1970's, around the same time that the county provided a trapper who helped control the predators. Public outcry over tax dollars being used to kill the animals caused the county to switch from a trap-

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Put a face to a byline with the *Light's* staff photo

## Coast Guard wives in Pt. Reyes

by Sasha Wolfe

Commodore Webster cuts into the Bolinas Ridge at the far end of Point Reyes Station, a long drive flanked by a tennis court and spotted with ominous government signs. Near its end, the road is broken by a set of yellow blockades and a turtle shaped placard that warns drivers to watch for children.

Beyond these are twenty-eight blue, gray, and yellow houses that are home to Coast Guard personnel and their families. The majority of the enlisted members on base are men. While they are at work their spouses are raising children and trying to

adapt to rural life, a difficult adjustment for many.

The Coast Guard is a branch of the United States armed forces, and is currently part of the Department of Homeland Security. The branch dates back to 1790, before the creation of the Navy, when the first ships were sent to protect America's ports and harbors. Their motto is "Semper Paratus," Latin for "always ready".

The Communications Area Master Station Pacific (CAMSPAC) is the central hub for communications between all Coast Guard stations, aircraft, merchant Marine

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On guard: Norman, a Great Pyrenees, protects sheep on a Hicks Valley ranch from coyotes and bobcats. Photo by Jacoba Charles.

## >> Dogs

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per to a non-lethal livestock protection program, which began in 2001.

Bill Barboni's flock of 160 ewes is protected by two guard dogs, Norman and Sam, which were partly paid for by the Marin County Livestock Protection Program (MCLPP). The dogs live in the pasture with the sheep and from a distance, the dogs are indistinguishable from the rest of the flock. The two Great Pyrenees are the same height and the same dusty shade of white as the ewes; only their dark noses and alert black eyes set them apart.

Great Pyrenees were bred as working dogs, and first appeared in Europe around 1000 B.C. They were first used as guard dogs in the Pyrenees Mountains, where they protected flocks from wolves and bears. The shaggy white dogs were also a court favorite in 17<sup>th</sup> century France.

The protective dogs generally are raised among sheep with a minimum of human contact. "They are part of the pack mentality," Barboni said. "They blend right in and it doesn't take long for the sheep to get used to them." The dogs

chase predators instinctively, and don't require any training to be effective.

"All the articles say you don't want to overtrain them," said Marcia Barinaga, who recently purchased Great Pyrenees to protect her small flock. "You don't want them looking at you to tell you what to do, you want them to decide on their own." In Marin County, the most common predators are coyotes and bobcats, and an occasional mountain lion.

Norman, Barboni's older dog, takes his job seriously. He is friendly and likes people, but after being petted for a short time will return to the herd. Many ranchers discourage their dogs from being as social as Norman. Barinaga said that her dogs are not socialized at all. "You herd them like sheep and catch them like sheep," she said. Barboni said that not all dogs have a strong enough work ethic to be both pets and working dogs, and that Norman is unusually good at doing both.

"He's like the dog in that old cartoon," said Barboni. "He puts on his hardhat and clocks in for the workday like any other employee. He takes his job very seriously."

Though Barboni has never seen Norman actually chase a predator, a neighbor saw him chasing off a mother coyote and her pups. The dog also alerted him by barking when a sheep had gotten

trapped in an unused cattle chute. And once, when a ewe was killed, Norman lay by her body and looked like he was grieving.

"I think using guard dogs is probably the most effective, and the most satisfying, way to protect the sheep," said Barboni. "And with what's legal in Marin County, quite frankly it's the only way to stay in business."

Although ranchers are allowed to shoot or trap coyotes on their own property, lethal methods can actually be counterproductive, Barboni said. The alpha coyote pair in a territory is usually the only one to mate and have pups; but if the alpha is killed, the other members of the pack may breed more prolifically.

Instead of supporting lethal methods through a trapper, the county now contributes \$40,000 each year to assist ranchers who use non-lethal predator deterrents. The MCLPP is open to any rancher who experiences livestock losses to predation. In Marin, virtually all of those are sheep ranchers. Anita Sauber with the Agricultural Commission, who helped design the program, said that 18 participants, who own approximately 75 percent of the 10,000 adult sheep in the county, are receiving financial support.

Ranchers with smaller herds of between 25 and 199 adult sheep are eligible

to receive \$500 each year; herd of over 200 can receive up to \$2,000. Ranchers are also compensated for the animals that are lost to predation. In addition to guard animals, which also may include Akbash dogs and llamas, the program provides funding for building and repairing fence; shepherding or night-lambing; and the use of scare devices designed to frighten predators with light or sound.

When Barboni first started using a guard dog ten years ago, he said that his losses to predation dropped to zero in the first year. As the coyotes acclimated to the dogs, his losses crept up to 5 or 10 percent and he began to modify his ranching technique to allow the dogs to be more effective.

Two changes what made a big difference were increasing fences, because it is easier for the dogs to monitor smaller pastures, and bringing the ewes into a shed when they lamb. "Mothering up," as he calls it, gives the mother and newborn a chance to bond and gather strength before being released back with the herd. Both of those methods are funded in part by the MCLPP.

"I know the program has made a difference for the sheep producers out there," Sauber said. "In addition to the cost sharing, they are also just being recognized in a way that they weren't before."