

TWO BIKE PARKS TO CLOSE IN FEBRUARY

Jumps of two courses have given rise to many professional mountain bikers



PHOTOS BY KEVIN JOHNSON — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Daniel Floro, 6, walks his bike up a dirt mound at the Aptos pump track in Aptos Village on Friday.

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APTOS » At 15 years old, the world-renowned Aptos mountain biking parks were always meant to be temporary. This week, developer Barry Swenson Builder announced plans to level the sites Feb. 17.

"It's going to suck because I come here every day," said Gavin Garvey, 12, of Aptos. "I'm not going to have anything fun to do."

Bulldozers will make way for the long-planned Aptos Village project at Soquel Drive and Trout Gulch Road. Channeling downtown Los Gatos and Willow Glen, the new town center will add homes and retail spaces. New Leaf Market is moving in, and the historic apple barn is getting refurbished.

Barry Swenson Builder

had planned to tear down the jumps when it acquired the property years before, but Jesse Nickell, company senior vice president, saw an opportunity when the Aptos Village plans continued to lag.

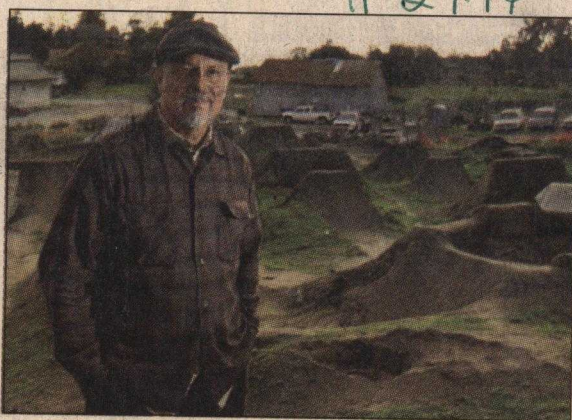
Nickell's children were avid mountain bikers. He struck a deal to lease the land from Barry Swenson Builder to Santa Cruz County for a \$1 a year and create a temporary public park, relieving the company of liability.

The park across the street from the "Post Office" has tall dirt mounds that launch bikers into the air where they do tricks.

"It seems like a bunch of dirt piles," he said. "But it's like a golden nugget. We've been producing some of the best jumpers."

For more than a decade, the Post Office dirt jumps and Epicenter pump

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Jesse Nickell, vice president at Barry Swenson Builder, was the brains behind the Aptos bike jumps and pump track.

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— Mark Davidson, Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz president

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track have helped 15 local kids reach the professional ranks. The initial cohorts of young daredevils, now grown up, mentor the younger kids on the dirt.

"The next generation inspires another," said Cameron McCaul, a 28-year-old Aptos native and professional freeride mountain biker who graces the covers of magazines and has a long list of sponsors. "It's like a revolving door."

The new crop of young riders are sometimes called "the children of Cam McCaul."

Like McCaul and his friends in the late 1990s, Aptos kids today head out to the bike parks every day after school.



KEVIN JOHNSON — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Cyclists speed over the rolling mounds of dirt that form the Aptos bike pump track Friday.

The bikers themselves built and maintained the Post Office dirt jump park and Epicenter pump track, which draw top-tier bikers from Europe and Canada.

Professional freeride mountain biker Brandon Semenuk spends his winters in Aptos, when his na-

tive Canada is covered in snow.

"The legacy of these two parks cannot be understated," said Mark Davidson, president of Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz. "They've influenced dirt pump parks nationally if not internationally."

The success of the Aptos parks have led to the creation of local pump tracks in Live Oak, the West Side of Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley. One is slated for Capitola.

"Jesse created a process an opportunity and a process for creating new parks, a way of which we can get temporary bike parks on private property," Davidson said.

The mountain bike club is currently looking for more land on which to build pump tracks, but they might not have to look too far in the end.

The Aptos Village project also includes plans for a new public park, which could become another magnet for mountain bikers. The public can weigh in on what they would like to see for the new space in about a year.