

# A Night's Lodging — Hostel Style

By JOHN McNICHOLAS

Sentinel Staff Writer

On a typical evening this week, the Santa Cruz Youth Hostel had distributed its 44 mattresses within an hour of opening its doors at 6 p.m., and was renting out floor space to travelers seeking inexpensive lodging for the night.

The two staff workers were passing out towels, blankets, and doing their best to answer a multitude of questions asked in polyglot — where a nude beach was, where a woman artist could contact other women, and, seemingly most important, where a good meal could be had.

The hostel, located in Mission Hills Junior High School's gymnasium, has offered wayfarers a place to sleep for the night since it opened for the season June 23. The travelers — mostly young, and most often European — may use the gym's showers, and get a breakfast of granola and fruit in the morning. The fee is \$4 for American Youth Hostel members, and \$5 for those who aren't.

Registration begins each evening at six; no reservations are accepted. No drugs, alcohol or smoking is allowed inside. The hostellers must be in by 11, when the doors are locked. They are awakened at 7 a.m. After a light breakfast and cleanup chores, in which all are expected to participate, the doors are locked again at 8, to remain so until evening.

A person may stay no more than three nights in a month. There is a women-only section, separated by a sheet from the combined coeducational and men's section, and by 7:30 on this particular evening, some travel-weary guests were already down for the count. Some were relaxing with a book from the large rack filled with travel literature, and others were preparing for an evening of more engaging pursuits in town — local entertainment guides are prominently posted, and bus schedules were patiently explained.

The visitors had come from as close as Cupertino, and as far away as New Zealand.

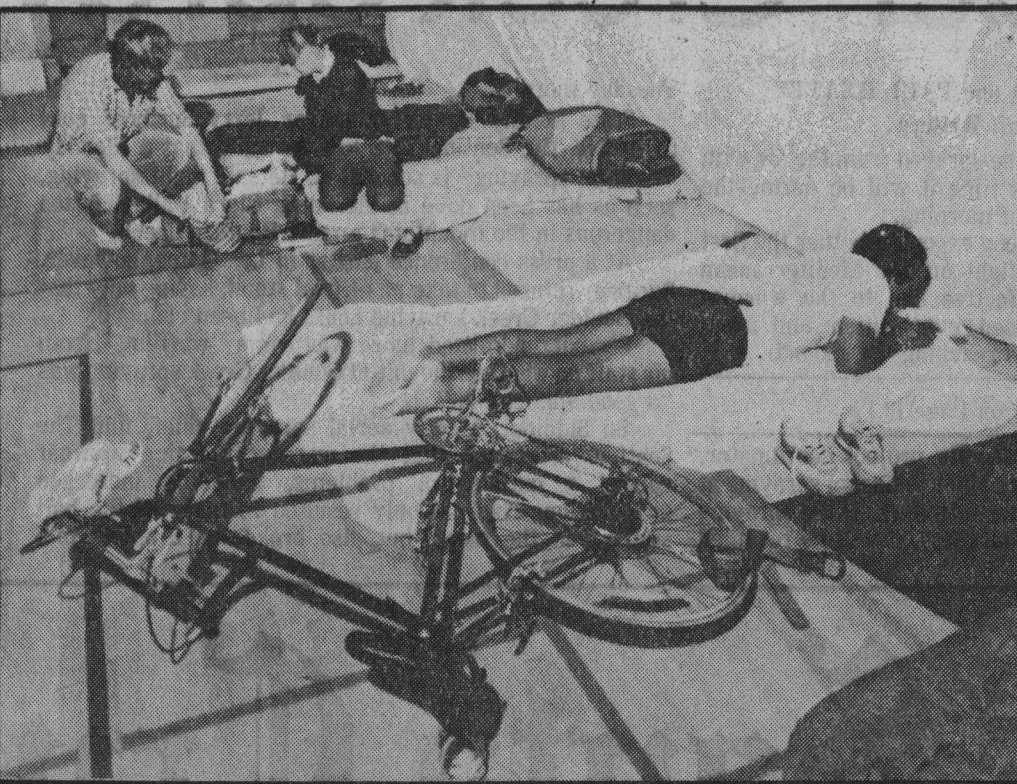
Tom Horsley, a self-employed accountant from over the hill was one of the "malathion refugees" that have been showing up at the hostel since the insecticide spraying began in Santa Clara County.

He had tried to stay at UCSC, he said, but was told by a gate guard that only Santa Cruz County residents were allowed refuge there. He went instead to the hostel.

A young woman from Germany, Christa Gotthardt, was stopping over on her way to Los Angeles. She had driven a car, she said, from New York to Denver, and had hitchhiked from there. Santa Cruz is "a nice town," she said, "with lots of friendly people, young people talking together and looking in each others' eyes."

"They don't do this so much in other places," she continued. "In Germany, the people there are not so friendly. Here, everyone is very friendly and talking about helping."

The hosting idea originated in Germany in 1909, when an elementary school



Ray Escamilla, on a biking tour from his home state of Arizona, catches up on the reading at the Santa Cruz Youth Hostel. This is a photo of the male/coeducational section of the hostel, there is also a women's only section.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

teacher realized his young charges needed a clean, inexpensive place to stay overnight on long hiking excursions. He began the first hostel in his own school, and the idea spread. In the 1930s, the McPherson family opened one of the first hostels on the West Coast in the Santa Cruz mountains near Castle Rock.

After World War II, the concept was revived, and today there are nearly 5,000 hostels in 50 countries worldwide. The Santa Cruz Hostel opened in 1972, and is one of a planned chain of hostels along the entire coast, each within a day's easy travel of the other.

A permanent hostel recently opened at Pigeon Point to the north, and Monterey is the closest hostel site south. A permanent year-round hostel with 30-40 beds is planned for the Wilder Ranch, but difficulties in setting the site have held up its progress. Some \$400,000 in state funds have been set aside for the project.

The majority of the hostellers are European students, although Richard Turman, a staff worker said the guests ranged in one night from a doctor with his family, traveling in a fancy car with a lot of luggage, to one person who had only the clothes on his back.

There is an occasional problem at the hostel with street people or other locals, according to Turman.

He and his co-worker, Sam Marion, said that now and then a local charitable institution provides indigents with a voucher good for a night's stay, but they stressed that the hostel's purpose wasn't to provide free lodging, nor is it equipped to handle crisis situations.

"A guy from Santa Cruz came in last week to check the place out," said Turman, "and got belligerent. He was yelling and calling me names, and accused us of ripping off the foreigners; he called us

bloodsuckers and leeches."

The man wasn't looking for a place to stay, and may have been intoxicated, according to Turman.

However, both Turman and Marion agreed that problems were few, and that most of them were caused by Americans rather than foreign travelers. The Europeans are more well-mannered, they said, and used to the hostel system.

The biggest problem, and the most amusing are the language barriers, the two staffers said. "mopping the floor" doesn't translate, they said, and there is no way to use sign language to describe a broom, or to use pidgin French to suggest cleaning a toilet.

However, someone in the crowd is usually bilingual, and can translate basic wants and needs.

A recent breakdown of hostel users over

a 36-day period showed of some 1,300 guest, about 500 were Europeans of various nationalities. Over 400 were from the United States, nearly 60 were Canadians, 59 were from "down under," and 35 came from "other" countries.

When the hostel closes its doors for the season on the 28th of this month, the congenial and friendly atmosphere in the gym will give way again to the sports activities of the junior high students. The Santa Cruz Hostel Society hopes the new hostel will be completed before next summer, and travelers may then find accommodations the year-round. The society's message phone will operate through the winter, Athow says, and current information will be available to callers. Anyone needing information, or wishing to donate time or winter storage space for the mattresses may call 423-8304.

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