

All Aboard!

Felton link to Santa Cruz to be restored

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER

Sentinel Staff Writer

FELTON — The owner of the Roaring Camp tourist train announced Wednesday he is buying the nine miles of Southern Pacific railroad tracks between Felton and Santa Cruz and plans to use them to haul freight and offer sightseeing trips between the two towns.

Norman Clark, president and founder of the Roaring Camp and Big Trees Narrow Gauge Railroad, is calling the new venture "The Santa Cruz, Big Trees & Pacific Railway Company." He wants to begin freight service in five months and passenger service soon thereafter, perhaps by the Fourth of July.

The purchase price was more than \$2 million, according to Clark.

The tracks run from the Olympia station next to the Lone Star Quarry in Felton to Maple Street in Santa Cruz a few blocks from the beach.

"This is the most beautiful railroad line in the Western United States," said Clark. "It needs to be preserved."

Clark, whose family has been involved in railroads since 1959, can recite locomotive lore the way baseball buffs can recite batting averages.

Aesthetics, however, are secondary. Clark believes the line stands to make a sizeable profit transporting cargo for local quarries, cement companies and lumber manufacturers.

Salz Tannery in Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz Lumber in Felton, and Lone Star Industries in Felton were mentioned as potential customers.

The route has not been used since 1982, when storms damaged the tracks. Southern Pacific did not consider the line profitable enough to repair, and the tracks have lain dormant ever since.

Before 1982 about eight companies used the line to haul cargo. Clark said it will cost about \$50,000 to repair the tracks.

In addition to the freight service, Clark plans to offer sightseeing trips from Roaring Camp to Santa Cruz on restored 1910-era rail motorcars.

"These cars are distinctive and their appearance will add character to the area," Clark said. Until the 1910 Mack "Bulldog" railcars are acquired, Clark plans to use other antique equipment for trips.

The tourist cars, as envisioned, will stop at some of the several scenic areas along the route, including the Garden of Eden swimming hole, Pogonip, Mount Hermon,

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All aboard!

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Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, the San Lorenzo River Bridge, and a number of quaint trestles and bridges built before the turn of the century.

Terms of the sale give Clark rights to use Southern Pacific tracks at the end of the line at Maple Street to the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf, Clark said.

Santa Cruz County transit officials have contacted Clark about providing commuter service on the new railroad. Clark said he is open to discussing the possibility.

Use of the train for film company charters, and the addition of authentic, Victorian-era dining cars for excursions under the are some of Clark's other dreams.

The sale culminates almost two years of negotiations between Clark and the Southern Pacific Railroad.

Clark and a group of 35 investors are spending "more than \$2 million" to purchase the line. Half of the investors live in Santa Cruz County; the other half are spread throughout California.

A list of directors of the new company, "including several prominent Californians," will be announced later this month, Clark said. Although operated next to the Roaring Camp tourist attraction, the new railroad com-

pany is a separate business, Clark said. Clark will be president of both companies, and the two railroads will be "cooperatively managed," he said.

Roaring Camp uses the "narrow-gauge" tracks used by logging companies. They are three feet across. The Santa Cruz-Felton tracks are 4-foot-8½ wide, the standard gauge for commercial trains.

Freight and passenger services first began on the line in 1875 when the Santa Cruz & Felton Railroad began. Some 2,500 persons from Santa Cruz County turned out to ride to the Big Trees area that day to picnic.

When the route was extended to Alameda in the 1880s, it became known as the "Picnic Line," used by thousands of Bay Area residents for weekend excursions.

In 1879, the railroad was purchased by Sen. James Fair, who wanted to build a transcontinental narrow-gauge railroad. Eight years later, after losing \$30 million on some 80 miles of track, Fair sold the company to Southern Pacific Railroad, which operated it until 1982. The tracks remained narrow-gauge width until 1970, Clark said.

The tracks northward used to go through Ben Lomond, Brookdale and Boulder Creek, but they were discontinued years ago, said Clark. Houses have been built on top of the tracks since then.

South of Felton the line used to connect to tracks to San Jose. This train stopped operating in the 1940s and rights to the tracks have been since sold.

Clark said he already has nine flat cars donated to him by the Spreckels Sugar Co. The company needs yet to buy locomotives.

The sale must be approved by the federal Interstate Commerce Commission, but Clark does not foresee any problems with that. Clark sees it as a formality which should not pose any delays.

Presidents Benjamin Harrison and Theodore F. Roosevelt traveled to Santa Cruz on the line, as did John D. Rockefeller and members of the Vanderbilt family.

Clark's acquisition of the route makes him Santa Cruz' own railroad tycoon.

Clark, a former Southern Pacific employee, started Roaring Camp Railroad in 1958 "with \$25 in my pocket," he says, and built it into one of the county's biggest tourist attractions. Last year 200,000 persons visited Roaring Camp.

"It took 17 years for it to make a profit, and it's been doing fine ever since," said Clark. "I'm very persistent. It isn't how long it takes for something to make money. It's how much you love what you're doing."