

The bridge is back

Wharf To Wharf Race returns to old course

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SANTA CRUZ — The bridge is back and the Wharf To Wharf Race returns to a more traditional track Sunday morning, in the 19th annual footrace from Santa Cruz to Capitola Village.

"This year the course is the safest and most picturesque we've ever had, partly because of the new Riverside Bridge," said Race Director Kirby Nicol, who is in charge of

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the 12,000 runners who are to cross that bridge when they come to it in the first of the 6 miles that make up the road course.

"It's really a beautiful bridge, if you stop to look at it," Nicol said.

Of course, Sunday nobody will be stopping to admire the new structure, which was more than a year in the making and last year forced the race to take an unusual detour while construction continued. Once runners get the 8:30 a.m. starting gun, to be fired from in front of the Coconut Grove at the corner of Beach and Cliff streets, they'll be part of a constantly moving mass that winds its way along the shoreline toward Capitola.

All streets affected by the race are to be closed to traffic, with crossings at intersections allowed for emergencies only. Closures begin at 8:30 a.m. and continue as late as 10 a.m. The affected streets are: Beach, Third, Riverside Avenue, San Lorenzo Boulevard, Murray, East Cliff Drive, Seabright, Lake, Eaton, Fifth Avenue, Opal Cliffs Drive and Wharf Road.

Runners must maintain a pace of 15 minutes a mile, with the race course to be open to traffic after the runners pass through. That means at Mile 1 the race is over at

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Early morning chill often forces runners to don baggy clothing.

Race

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8:45 a.m., and at Mile 2 it's over at 9 a.m., and so on along the course, Nicol said.

In Capitola, where the finish line is at the base of Wharf Road, the Esplanade area is to be closed until noon. Traffic through the other streets in the village should start to open up about 11 a.m., Nicol said.

The course begins with a Beach Street sprint past the Boardwalk, taking a sharp left at Third and swinging back with a right turn onto Riverside. After crossing the bridge, runners turn right again onto East Cliff, following it up past the train trestle and heading toward the cliffs at the top of the hill.

The course this year is back on its traditional path past the Santa Cruz Museum to Seabright Avenue, then to Murray and across the bridge at the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor. From there, runners wind along the beach, past Twin Lakes and stay on East Cliff until it merges with Opal Cliffs Drive. From there, it's a run to the finish line, down the Cliff Drive hill into the village.

Each mile is to be marked by an arch of rainbow-colored balloons, and 30 different musical groups will be spread along the course to lighten the atmosphere. "There is everything from country and western to bagpipes," Nicol notes.

Spectating has become an active part of the race in recent years, particularly since the race has been selling out in advance the 12,000 spots it is limited to



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When the starter's gun fires, runners hope to break out of the pack.

because of safety reasons. This year's race officially sold out June 17.

"For all those (runners) who didn't get in, we don't want them to feel like they got left out," Nicol said. "Unlike some other races, which encourage runners to run in all stages of dress and undress, we don't do that. We encourage runners to come out and look like runners, but on the other hand, encourage all spectators to come out with whistles and water hoses and have a good

time."

As for watching the race, some good spots include the trestle area, Twin Lakes Beach, the Opal Cliffs shopping center, Pleasure Point and up along the railroad tracks on Cliff Drive.

"The worst place is at the start," Nicol said. "The gun goes and you are out of it. The farther along the course you get, the more fun it's going to be. A lot of it has to do with the kind of mu-

sic you like."

Anywhere along the course, spectators can keep track of the race from start to finish by tuning into KSCO radio (1080 AM), which is to broadcast the event from 8-10 a.m.

Of the advance registered runners, there are normally 1,200 to 1,500 no-shows, and up to 200 non-registered runners. That figures to what Nicol estimates will be 11,000 runners in Sunday's race.