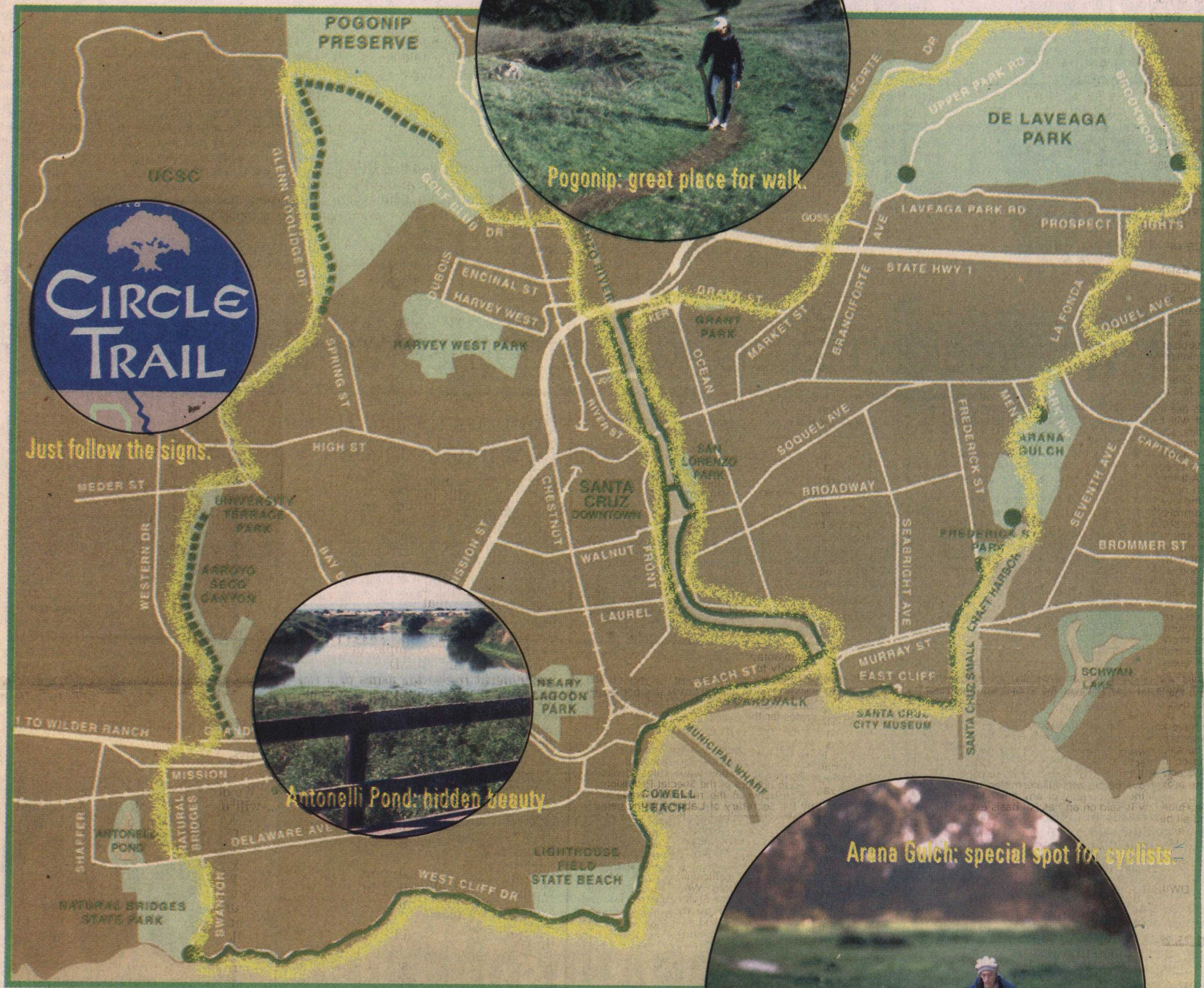


Hit the CIRCLE Trail



✓ Festivities showcase Santa Cruz eco-circuit

Trails

5-29-97

BLEND THE endurance of the Xtreme Games with the environmentalism of the Eco-Challenge, then add a healthy dose of Mardi Gras-style costumes, and you have the recipe for Santa Cruz County's first ever EcoThon.

On Saturday baton-carrying teams will participate in a 27-mile relay that includes walking, running, biking, skateboarding, paddling and other modes of human-powered transportation.

The race is not restricted to athletes; in fact, it is designed for folks of all ages and skill levels. Points are even awarded for creative costumes worn during the relay.

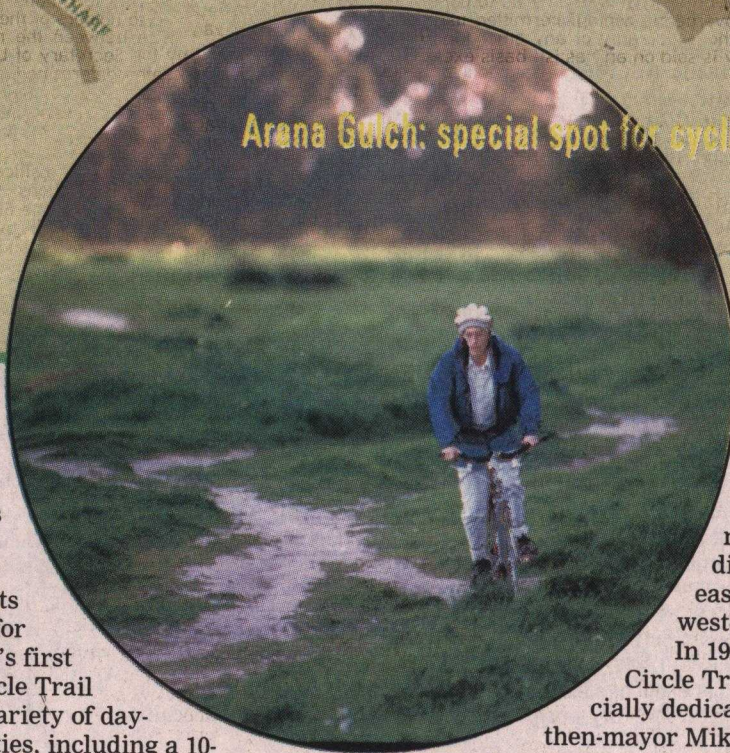
"I'm going to wear something wacky," says Carla Sanchez, who plans to form a team which will include her 10-year old son. "He wants to skateboard on the

paved portions."

The EcoThon is just one of nearly two dozen events scheduled for Santa Cruz's first annual Circle Trail Day. The variety of day-long activities, including a 10-kilometer run, a mountain-bike ride and an EcoFair at San Lorenzo Park are intended to introduce locals and tourists alike to the Circle Trail -- a scenic 27-mile loop linking the city's greenbelts. The trail (which is expected to be formally expanded from 24 to 27 miles later this year) is a pedestrian and bicyclist

By KAREN KEFAUVER
Sentinel correspondent

route over public property. Skirting some of the city's finest natural attractions -- including Lighthouse Field State Beach, Arroyo Seco Canyon and



Arena Gulch: special spot for cyclists.

Sentinel graphic, photos

DeLaveaga Park -- the route can be divided into eastern and western loops.

In 1995, the Circle Trail was officially dedicated by then-mayor Mike Rotkin on

National Trails Day. Now, nearly two years later, with the cooperation from the City of Santa Cruz, the National Parks Service and the vision of EcoTopia/USA (a Santa Cruz non-profit organization), the celebration is underway.

Susan Harris, associate planner for the city's Parks and Recreation Department, has watched the project grow almost since its inception.

"I think this is a great way to introduce citizens to the beautiful and precious parklands within the city," says

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Circle Trail

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Harris, who first got involved with Circle Trail when she worked with the National Park Service. "It is nice to see the project come full circle while I am working for the city of Santa Cruz," she noted. "I appreciate the hard work to get the event going."

According to event coordinator Don Weiss, of EcoTopia/USA, the best feature of the Circle Trail is its "combination of elements." Weiss, who recently spent two days completing the trek, says, "I spent an hour walking through Pogonip, then the university, then a few minutes on the city streets, then through Arroyo Seco to Antonelli Pond. The scenery changes every half an hour, or hour. You get a feeling for the redwoods, the coastal prairies, the river levee, the cliffs.

"It is very easy hiking," adds Weiss. "There are only a few yards of rough trail."

This route, consisting of two non-exact circles, ties together the various elements that make up Santa Cruz — and that includes parts of downtown and the Santa

Eco-party

■ **WHAT:** Circle Trail Day

■ **WHEN:** Saturday, 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

■ **RACES:** 10K run, 8:30 a.m.; kids fun run, 11:15 a.m.

■ **WALKS:** Arana Gulch, Pogonip, UCSC, River levee 9 a.m.

■ **MARCH:** Along West Cliff Drive, 9:30 a.m.

■ **FESTIVAL:** Ecology Fair, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., San Lorenzo Park

■ **INFO:** 426-8810, www.ecotopia.org

Cruz Beach Boardwalk. That means simple comforts are not far away.

"I have hiked in the Himalayas," Weiss said, "and sometimes I have really wanted to sit on a chair, not a rock, and have tea without getting out the stove."

There won't be much time for sitting on Circle Trail Day, because so many activities are planned. Starting with a 8:30 a.m. 10-kilometer run, the event lineup also includes separate walks at Arana

Gulch, Pogonip and UC Santa Cruz; a paddle along the San Lorenzo River; tours of the Long Marine Lab, UCSC's Agroecology Farm Tour and the Chadwick Garden tour. A mountain-bike ride, a road ride and a bicycle safety clinic and ride for kids are also scheduled.

One of the highlights of the day, says Paul Lee, the founder of EcoTopia/USA and the visionary who helped spearhead the Circle Trail concept, will be the unveiling of the Ecology Hall of Fame at the San Lorenzo Park EcoFair.

Lee said the Hall of Fame is a permanent installation that is to honor five environmentalists. The Eco Fair also is going to feature live music, speakers and informa-

tion booths.

Weiss hopes that the Circle Trail Day event will alert people that there is something out there just waiting to be enjoyed — and protected. Down the line, he hopes the Trail can be used to promote ecotourism within the county. Other future goals for Weiss and EcoTopia/USA include creating a "sister trail" agreement (similar to a sister city) with a trail in Hong Kong.

"We want to make people more conscious that Santa Cruz is an ecotopia," explains Weiss. "A place where people care about the food they eat, the air they breathe and the coast they live by. We have a caring community who wants to protect the environment and who enjoys recreation outdoors."