

Gray Whale Ranch opens

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SANTA CRUZ — At last, Gray Whale Ranch is open.

Eight miles of trails were opened to the public this week, said David K. Vincent, district superintendent for the state Parks Department.

This partial unveiling is a noteworthy step in the scenic property, which has long been held in private hands.

"It's beautiful whether you're a hiker, a runner or a bicyclist," said Chuck Beebe, a horseback rider and mountain biker.

He noted that the opening less than six months since it was taken over by state parks.

"Everyone worked together," Beebe said, acknowledging the effort of different park users

11-21-97
and government agencies. "It had to be a combined effort."

The opening, however, has been a quiet affair because the weather has kept many people away.

The best access to Gray Whale is through adjoining Wilder Ranch State Park. The Engelsman Trail and Eucalyptus Loop Trail lead to Gray Whale.

Once on the property, trails go as far as Smith Grade Road.

The parks staff is asking for everyone's cooperation to stay on the approved paths because of the environmental sensitivity of the 2,300-acre ranch, which is home to the threatened California red-legged frog and the endangered Santa Cruz cypress. There is no public access north of Smith Grade Road under this interim use.