

Trails unveiled at Gray Whale

By MAY WONG
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Hop onto your mountain bikes, swing on to your horses, or strap on your hiking boots: a sneak preview of Gray Whale Ranch will be Saturday.

The community event is the first invitation to the public to visit the latest addition to the state park system and traverse its 12 miles of scenic trails without trespassing. Gray Whale will not officially open until summer.

"There's been so much publicity about Gray Whale; people in the community are really excited about it opening," said of Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz, which is sponsoring the one-day event. "This will give people a chance to get out there and finally enjoy it."

Conservationists scored an environmental coup when the San Francisco-based Save-the-Redwoods League bought the 2,300-acre property in October from Idaho lumberman Ron Yanke. He sold the property for about \$12.75 million after years of failed attempts to develop or log the forested land.

The property, complete with its sweeping vistas of the Monterey Bay, is nestled between Wilder Ranch State Park and UC Santa Cruz. It still belongs to the conservation group, but it will soon be handed over to state parks officials who plan to join it with the neighboring Wilder Ranch.

The planned preview is part of an effort to help the Save-the-Redwoods-League raise \$600,000 to cover the purchase costs, Kelsen said. The local mountain

3-31-97
bikers group has so far raised about \$14,000, but hopes to raise at least \$20,000 altogether.

The preview event will conclude with a raffle of \$23,000 worth of bicycle equipment. It will also feature trail-building demonstrations and classes about sharing the road with bicyclists, hikers, and equestrians.

State parks officials have not yet determined whether some of Gray Whale's trails will be restricted to allow only hikers. Since the property will be part of Wilder Ranch, where bikers and horses are allowed, state parks officials indicated earlier

that bicyclists and equestrians have the upper hand in the long-standing debate among the competing recreational users.

The event is free and will be Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Registration will be at the corral area at Wilder Ranch. Tours will be available, but visitors may explore Gray Whale on their own. With a \$10 "lift ticket," a shuttle van will transport bicycle riders to top for the rides down hill.

Demonstrations, workshops and refreshments will begin after 1 p.m. The raffle drawing will be at 3 p.m. Raffle tickets are available at over 50 bike shops in the Monterey-San Francisco Bay Area for \$5 each or \$20 for five. The raffle tickets will also be eligible for a second drawing that will occur May 18 at the Bike to Work Week Fair.

For information, call Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz at 438-1254.