

Coastal Trail makes inroads in Santa Cruz

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For more than three decades, California residents have dreamed of a 1,200-mile trail running the length of the state's coastline, in the same vein as other great national trails like the Pacific Crest or the Appalachian.

This week, the vision is taking a visible step forward locally as trail enthusiasts mark a stretch of the Santa Cruz County coastline with the trail's official insignia — a small blue and white sign that reads California



Coastal Trail.

"Signing this trail links it to the statewide effort," said Judy Rosales, a steward with Sonoma

California Coastal Trail markers are being installed along West Cliff Drive in Santa Cruz.

County-based nonprofit Coastwalk, which is in charge of putting up the signs. By connecting hikers and bikers to the "bigger picture," Rosales says, support will grow for the trail's grand plan.

While hikers and bikers have imagined a coastal trail since at least the 1970s, the official

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Trail

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endorsement of the Legislature and two voter-approved bonds this decade have helped speed plans for the Oregon-to-Mexico route. State officials estimate about 600 miles of trail are in place and used by thousands each day.

Like elsewhere in the state, the trail through Santa Cruz County weaves together existing footpaths, bicycle routes, State Parks trails and other paths to create a continuous thoroughfare. More than half of the route through the county is complete, with some sections open to cyclists and equestrians in addition to pedestrians.

"I was surprised I could walk so much beach in Santa Cruz [County]," said Justin Davis, a recent UC Santa Cruz graduate who walked about 1,000 miles of the California Coastal Trail this summer.

The 32-year-old, who stayed mostly in State Parks campgrounds and sometimes at hostels during his two-month trek, said there was "a little more" walking on roads than he expected but the scenery was more than worth his while. Davis called the Lost Coast, a section of undevel-



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Save Our Shores staff and board members Laura Kasa, Ginaia Kelly and Aleah Lawrence-Pine attach a California Coastal Trail sign to the fence along Santa Cruz's Main Beach on Monday. Fourteen signs will mark the route between Natural Bridges and the Boardwalk. The 1,200-mile California coast now has 306 markers over 98 miles.

oped coastline in Humboldt County, the most ruggedly beautiful part.

The first stretch of Santa Cruz County to get the new trail signs is West Cliff Drive, where a dozen signs will be put up between Natural Bridges State Park and Santa Cruz Main Beach. The signage eventually will

extend to points north and south.

Victor Roth, a recreation specialist for State Parks, says park officials have been working to complete the Santa Cruz County section of the Coastal Trail on state lands for years. State Parks, which is the county's biggest coastal landowner,

If You Go

WHAT: Coastal trail dedication, celebrated simultaneously with Coastal Cleanup Day.

WHEN: 1 p.m. Saturday.

WHERE: Cowell Beach, Santa Cruz.

DETAILS: www.californiacoastaltrail.info.

has pursued the goal through land acquisitions, like Coast Dairies in the Davenport area, and by working with private property owners to gain public access along the ocean.

"Owing to staffing and financial limitations, we can't just do it in one fell swoop," Roth said. "But it's my goal to be able to walk from Santa Cruz to Davenport and beyond before I retire."

The California Coastal Conservancy, the state agency leading the trail project, does not have a time line for completion but says a final trail is still decades away.

A ceremony commemorating the trail in Santa Cruz County and the new signs is scheduled for Saturday sponsored in part by Save Our Shores.

For information on the trail, visit www.californiacoastaltrail.info.

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