

Walking to nearby store has become risky business

By VINCENT T. LEONARD

The poet may find "a pleasure in the pathless woods" but the pedestrian finds only hazard and fright on a pathless roadway.

Anyone who has tried to walk from Aptos village to the Rancho del Mar Shopping Center or even along Cathedral Drive, Rio del Mar Blvd., or for that matter, along any well-traveled way in mid-county, will know what I mean.

There was a time when pathways bordered every county road in this area, from each village, crossroads store or district school to every home within two miles of it. And that in an era when a hike right in the roadway was possible in sparse, slow-moving traffic.

But, against all common sense, the faster and heavier our traffic became, the fewer means the pedestrian was left for safe journeys afoot. When two-lane highways and 30 m.p.h. speed limits came in, the roadside pathways gave way to gravelled shoulders, which afforded to the pedestrian a wide and safe, if ankle-twisting, area in which to plod along.

The third and fourth lanes came to cover all but a few inches of the shoulder, leaving the pedestrian scarce room to balance himself safely against endless lines of traffic that whizzed by a 45, then 55, then 65 m.p.h.

When all Aptos school children attended the "little red school-house" where The Assembly of God Church now stands, there was a pathway down each side of the County Road (Soquel Drive) from the west end of the village to the Aptos Creek Bridge.

By 1912, parental insistence had moved county officials to add a foot bridge to the existing vehicle bridge.

Once over the bridge, the school children followed a pathway that wound along the top of a bank that bordered the east side of the County Road and that had probably been cut by their parents' feet when they attended the first Aptos School farther up

the hill. Part of that bank was leveled to create the present creek-bank shopping area and its big parking lot, part of it to fill a much-too-deep drainage ditch along the front of the present Rancho Aptos.

An elderly or infirm person or a child following much the same route to Rancho del Mar Shopping Center today must run a veritable steeplechase. The hazards are varied.

Not only must he preserve a nice balance in a narrow, rough space beside fast-moving cars throughout the course, but, leaving the footbridge at Soquel and Spreckels Drives, he must plunge into a maelstrom of traffic at that dangerous intersection and thread his way through it up under the trestle to the parking lot for the creek-bank business area, without benefit of a discernable shoulder for a pathway.

Here he must become alert to a new hazard — cars backing out of the maze of parking places. At the upper end of the parking area, he must wait until a motorist comes along who has good enough eyesight and a good enough education to read the 25 m.p.h. speed-limit sign for that portion of Soquel Drive, so that he can cross to the Rancho del Mar.

Once across, he finds an even

more expansive parking area filled with backing, turning cars.

Then, with the added handicap of bags of purchases, he must run the course back home. If it is winter, he will face several water jumps along the way and perhaps a few "men-at-work" areas, with shoulders so dug up that he is forced to brave a walk in the traffic lanes.

There were once some well-defined paths from the old school north-westward to the old Freitas homestead (the present site of the fire house and Mar Vista School, but the children from Mar Vista now must thread their way through the traffic of the outer lanes.)

To add to our present pedestrian woes, the Powers that Be, with only a curt bow to local preferences, have located the new library near enough to the largest shopping center to draw crowds, but they have put it across busy Soquel Drive from the center and have made no provisions for a pedestrian overpass!

I'm afraid we'll have to wait until several youngsters have been crippled for life and several oldsters have received the death penalty for their impaired sight, hearing and responses before we produce some substitute for the old paths.

KENNOLYN RIDING SCHOOL



ENROLL NOW!!!

FOR 1st QUARTER,
STARTING FRIDAY,
SEPTEMBER 21



Covered lighted ring, 2 outdoor rings, miles of trails & hunter's course. Children & adults day & eves. Schools for other groups encouraged. Also boarding.

CALL 475-1676 or 476-6939