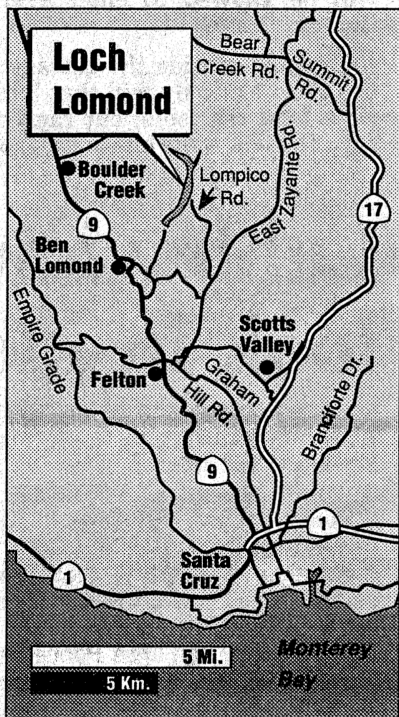


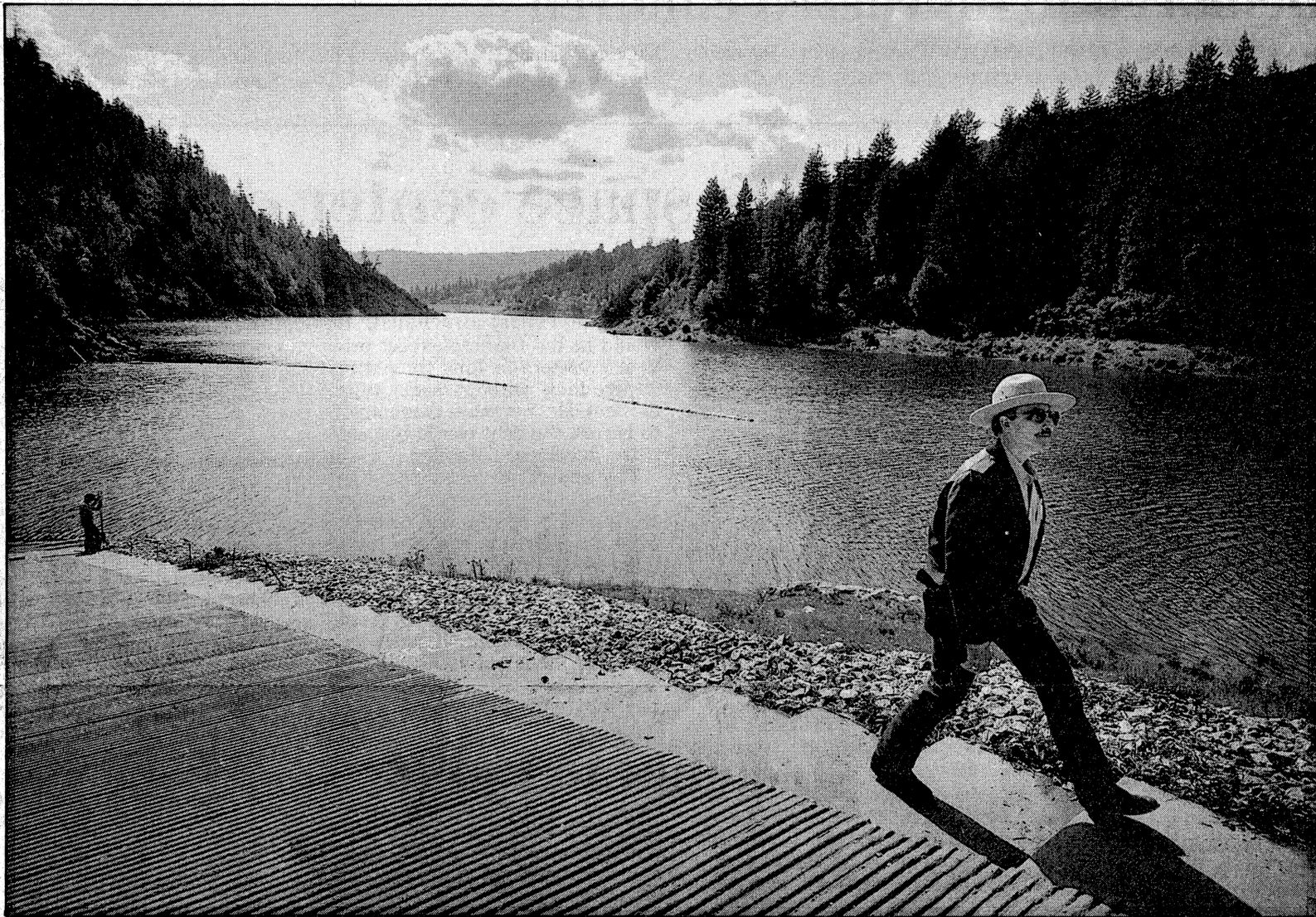
Where the really big ones live



CARL NEIBURGER — MERCURY NEWS

Chief Ranger Walt Cacace, right, checks out boat-launching ramp at Loch Lomond. The reservoir, the best freshwater fishing spot in the Santa Cruz Mountains — some say in the Bay Area — will reopen April 8 after being closed for four years because of drought.

CHERYL NUSS — MERCURY NEWS



Loch Lomond to reopen, and anglers are eager

BY PAUL ROGERS
Mercury News Staff Writer

Water experts aren't quite ready to call off the drought, but in Santa Cruz County Tuesday, they sent up a promising sign that things might be returning to normal.

Loch Lomond Reservoir, the best freshwater fishing spot in the Santa Cruz Mountains — some say in the Bay Area — will reopen April 8 after being closed for four years because of drought.

The heaviest spring rains in nearly a

decade have brought the reservoir near Ben Lomond up to 64 percent of capacity, finally enough to put the boat ramp under water again, said Bill Kocher, water director for the city of Santa Cruz.

"Everyone's encouraged," he said. "This is a harbinger of really good things."

Locking the gates every summer since 1987 also is a harbinger of really huge fish: The largemouth bass and rainbow trout in Loch Lomond have been fattening up to prize-winning sizes.

Area fishing enthusiasts see the 1992 Loch Lomond season as a dream come true.

"It's always been good up there," said Willie Starks, head of the fishing department at Outdoor World in Santa Cruz. "But there'll probably be some record bass coming out of there now."

Rangers say they have seen 15-pound bass. A fish one-third that size is considered a good catch.

Since Feb. 10, when steady storms began, 20.58 inches of rain have fallen on

the Santa Cruz watershed, swelling the lake to its highest level in five years.

And for the first time since 1987, water has actually run off hillsides, down Newell Creek and into Loch Lomond.

The city also has been pumping excess water from the San Lorenzo River into the lake.

Tuesday, the lake surface stood at 557 feet above sea level. In 1988, the low point was 530 feet.

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