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## Ranching family donates rugged land for public trail

Sunday, September 21, 2008

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By MIKE TRELEVEN  
Register Business Editor

Cattle and hikers may now be able to share some Napa trails, thanks to local ranchers John and Judy Ahmann.

The Ahmanns have granted an easement for use of land along the Napa-Yolo county line, east of Lake Berryessa, to the Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District.

The donation now gives hikers a chance to trudge up the Blue Ridge, the 3,000-foot highlands controlled by the federal Bureau of Land Management, to take in a view ranging from the Sierra Nevada to the east to Mount Tamalpais to the west.

It will be at least one year before the trail is open to the public.

"The terrain is very steep. It is not for the faint of heart. You have to be in good shape, but the views are great," said John Woodbury, general manager of the Napa County Parks and Open Space District.

The easement on the working cattle ranch is about half a mile long. "Without it, a lot of BLM land would not be accessible. This opens up a lot of other public land that was landlocked," Woodbury said.

John Ahmann said, "I hope everyone who uses the trail enjoys it and appreciates the wild and scenic areas. We are trying to preserve our property as it is."

The Ahmanns' motivation for donating the easement goes back to John Ahmann's Boy Scout days while growing up in Los Angeles. He enjoyed hiking and camping. One of the highlights of his scout career was going to Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, N.M.

"We want to contribute something that people can benefit from. I'm glad we can help," said Ahmann, who came to Napa in 1970.

The couple also has a cattle operation in eastern Oregon and raise about 600 head of cattle between the two states.

Woodbury said volunteers will construct the trail, clear brush, install gates and signs, and prepare maps and other informational materials. "The cost will be very little," he said.

The Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District board of directors accepted the donation at a special meeting on Sept. 15. "The directors were thrilled when they received news of the donation," Woodbury said.

Board member Harold Kelly said, "This is like the Sierra Nevada, in terms of Blue Ridge's dramatic views and wild and rugged character."

The closest access point is from the Knoxville-Berryessa Road to the top of Berryessa Peak.

The district and Ahmanns still have to work out operational details to ensure compatibility between hikers and ranching operations.

Hunters, motorized vehicles and horses are banned from the trail easement.

This is the second time a Napa County landowner has donated a trail easement to Napa County Parks and Open Space District, according to Woodbury. Property owner John Tuteur, who is also the county's recorder, clerk and assessor, donated a trail easement on his ranch near Skyline Park.

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