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Doug Cruger, a volunteer and vice president of the Bonita Valley Horsemen, and Bow Tie cross a bridge at Otay Valley Regional Park, west of Interstate 805. David Brooks / Union-Tribune

OTAY MESA

Equestrians get staging area

By **Kaitlin Schluter**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A new equestrian area has opened near Otay Valley Regional Park, complete with parking spaces for horse trailers and a warm-up pen.

The Mace Street staging area, located west of Interstate 805 and north of the U.S.-Mexico border, opened on National Trails Day, June 5. In addition to parking, the facility also features a shaded area for visitors, a couple of horse corrals and two more miles of trail.

"The trails have been here for quite some time, but in order to make it friendly for

equestrians, they needed a place to park and not be in the way on the streets," said Steve Ron, project manager with the San Diego County Public Works Department.

The dirt path now stretches more than eight miles and includes a separate route just for horses.

"It's been really, in some respects, a bootstrap operation," said county Supervisor Greg Cox, who worked with San Diego and Chula Vista to round up resources for the project.

The three entities played a role in the expansion: The county built the facility; the city of Chula Vista owns the

property; and the city of San Diego will maintain the area. Planning started seven years ago and construction took three years. The project cost roughly \$9 million.

About 16 tons of trash was removed, Cox said, as the area had been used as a dumpsite and homeless encampment. During the cleanup, the county worked with organizations such as The Alpha Project and Father Joe's Villages to meet with the homeless and get them help.

"It's not only been a rejuvenation of the riverbed but also in

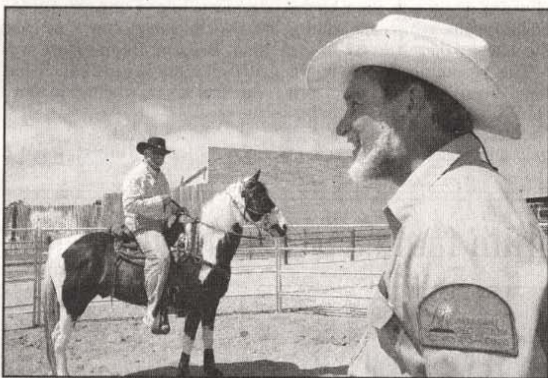
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Mark Kukuchek (right), president of the Bonita Valley Horsemen, gives county Supervisor Greg Cox instructions on how to ride his horse, Bandit, in a corral at a new equestrian area near Otay Valley Regional Park. David Brooks / Union-Tribune

TRAILS

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There's also a path for hikers and cyclists

many respects, kind of a rejuvenation of people's lives," Cox said.

The trail is now ready for use, including a path for hikers and cyclists. During a recent event celebrating the area's opening, Cox — who has ridden the trail on a bike — mounted Bandit, a black and white stallion, with little hesitation. With a tip of his black cowboy hat, Cox coaxed the horse around the new warm-

up pen before hitting the dirt path.

Mark Kukuchek, a member of an advisory committee for the area and president of the Bonita Valley Horsemen, has ridden the new trail a couple of times since the opening. He said the route is well-maintained.

More equestrian trails are on the way. The ultimate plan is to extend the trails east to the Otay reservoirs, and connect with the Pacific Crest Trail. The next step is a connecting trail west of Interstate 5 at Swiss Park in Chula Vista. The county also is discussing the possibility of an equestrian facility in the Tijuana River Valley.

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Odyssey Hospice: Volunteers are needed to assist with office work.

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Words Alive: Volunteers are needed to mentor scholarship recipients.

Contact: Chrissy Green Califf
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The Stay Classy Foundation: Volunteers are needed to help with the T-Mobile City Chase on Saturday. The event in part will benefit The Stay Classy Foundation, established to serve San Diego community interests through philanthropic initiatives.