Eugene connects with international trail

By HARRY ESTEVE
Of the Emerald

Construction has begun on a new 78-mile link-up with the Pacific Crest Trail — and this one is for hikers only.

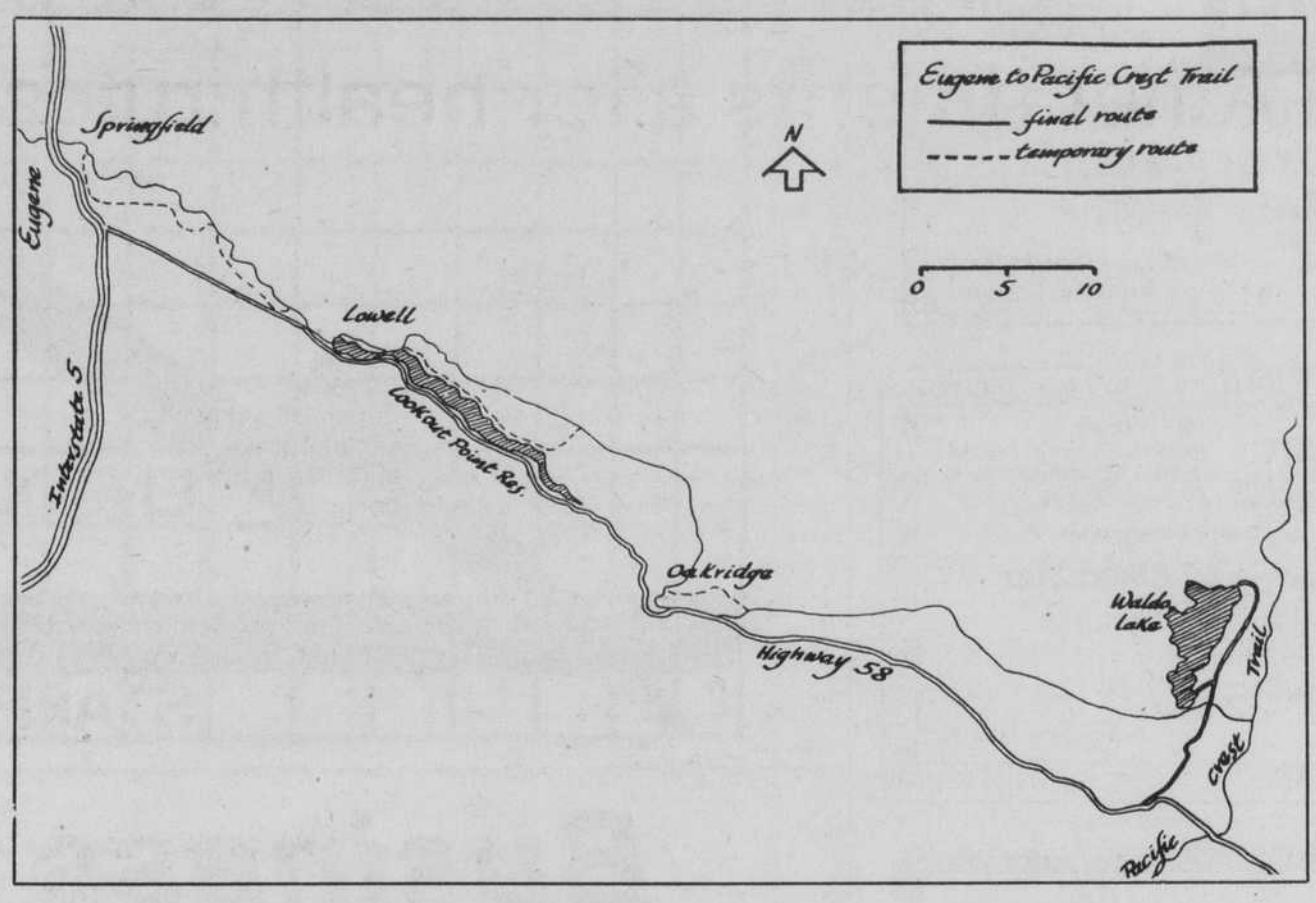
When it's finished, a backpack and a walking stick may be all that's necessary for a hiking trip from Eugene to the Cascades.

Local Sierra Club members and several community volunteers currently are clearing brush and flagging trees in a narrow valley near Oakridge to prepare it for the trail.

The new route is designed to provide backpackers with access to Oregon wilderness areas without having to rely on a car for transportation.

The Pacific Crest Trail, world famous for its scenery and length, covers about 2,000 miles of switchbacks, traverses and other wilderness meanderings. Starting at the Canadian border, it passes through the Cascades of Washington and Oregon, and continues along the Sierra Nevadas until it ends in Mexico.

The idea for the Eugene link originally was proposed in 1978 as part of a Willamette National Forest land management plan, according to Sierra Club representative Jack Desmond.



The idea then became a project of the Oregon Recreational Trails Program.

Construction began after an agreement was reached last August between the state transportation department, the State of Oregon and the Many Rivers Group, a local branch of the Sierra Club.

Although the Many Rivers Group has received $3,000 in state funds, Desmond says the money barely covers the cost of the simple hand tools being used to build the trail. The often strenuous labor required is provided entirely by volunteers.

Desmond says 50 people have signed on as possible volunteers, but not more than 10 actually show up to work.

Volunteers can expect a "spiritual satisfaction of doing something good for the community," if they give their time and backs to the new trail, but little else, Desmond says.

"It's unfortunate that most people don't appreciate those intangible benefits of community work."

The completed trail will begin in Eugene at the bike path near Beltline Road. It will pass through Alton Baker Park and follow the river to the Middle Fork of the Willamette River.

From there it should continue upriver, cross Lookout Point Dam, pass through Westfir and climb a long ridge above Highway 58. After ascending the north side of Salt Creek valley, it will connect with existing trails and finally connect with the Pacific Crest Trail near Waldo Lake.

"It's going to be a very slow project," Desmond admits. He foresees a completion date of 1986.

Desmond says he believes the project will demonstrate a need for trails such as the Eugene link, because "people will be more apt to start walking when the gasoline starts to run dry."

"This trail will be very feasible 15 or 20 years down the line."

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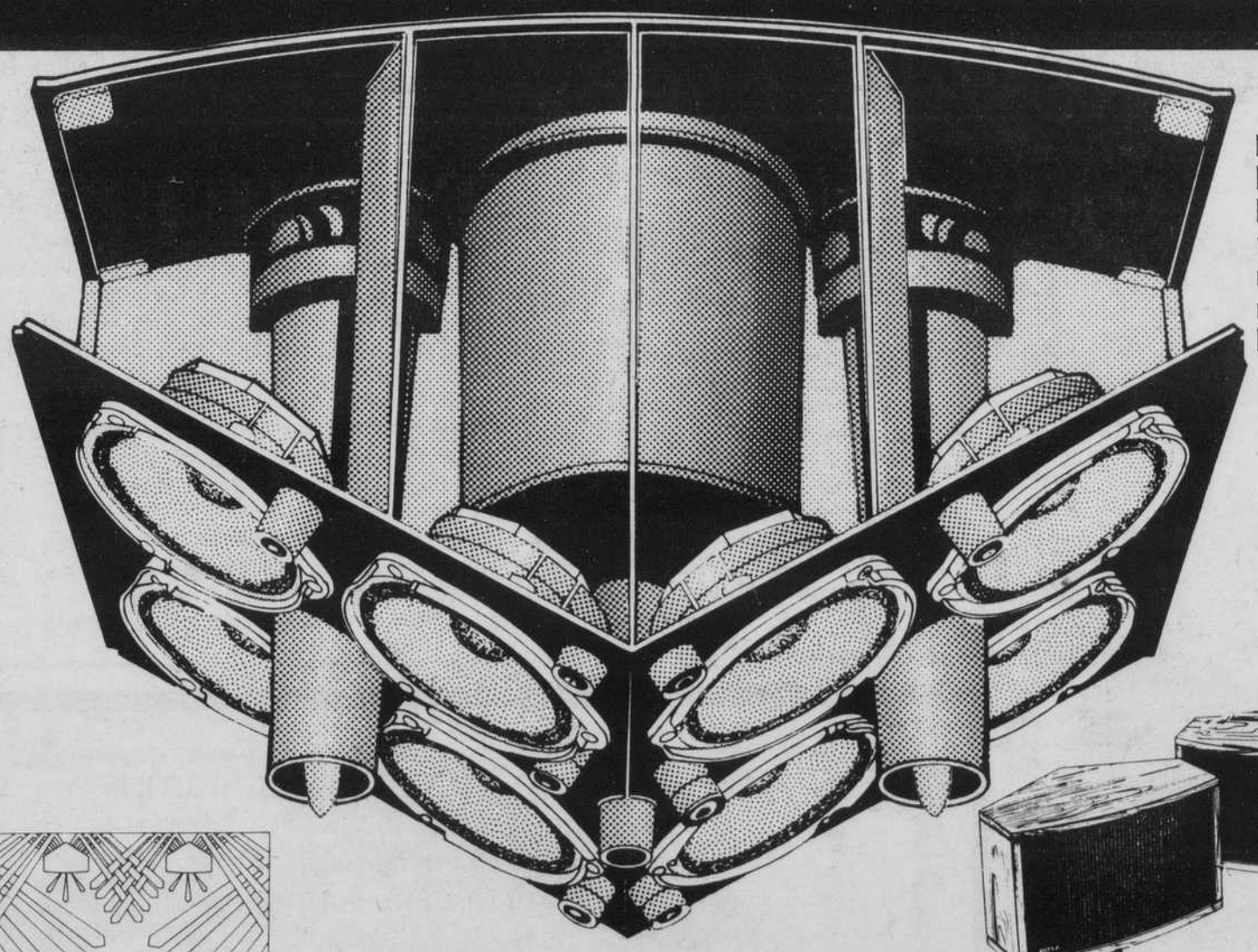

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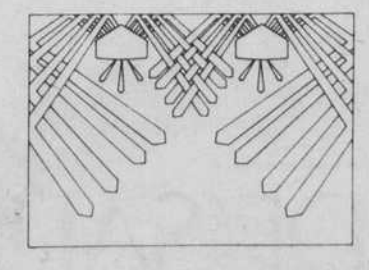

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