

# Skirting the fault lines



Geologist Todd Becker ascends from a trench on the College of the Redwoods campus. Laco Associates is digging and checking several trenches to search for active faults that may determine where new structures are located. See additional photo on Page A8.

## Geologists dig deep before college construction

John Driscoll  
THE TIMES-STANDARD

State law demands that school buildings not be built within 50 feet of any active earthquake faults, so when College of the Redwoods wanted to construct several new ones, it would have to do a lot of poking around underground.

LACO Associates has been digging deep trenches near the sites where the new physical and life science building, the student union building, and an administration and theater building are planned. The college had hoped to retrofit the old buildings, but fault lines nearby tripped up the plans.

Recently, geologists have been digging and going down into the trenches, looking for soil layers that bend or break, indicating the presence of a fault.

One trench, 20 feet deep and 4 feet wide, runs up the side of a hill just above a planned building site.

"Obviously something made the hill," said CR Facilities Director Joe Porras.

So far, things look good, and it doesn't appear that the building site will have to be moved. That could change.

Porras said that when LACO trenches across the road, a fault could be uncovered, and that would make the college change its game plan.

To be allowed to build on or near a

fault, it has to be shown to be 11,000 years old or older — an inactive fault. Determining that age can be complicated when top soil is removed, as it was in many areas on campus during its development. If you can't tell, Porras said, you have to err on the side of caution.

The whole area is riddled with faults, and CR geology professor Dave Bazard said much of the geology of the area was uncovered by the Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s investigations in the 1960s that led to the decommissioning of its King Salmon nuclear power plant.

The new buildings at College of the Redwoods are expected to be done between 2009 and 2011.



MARK MCKENNA/THE TIMES-STANDARD

Frank Bickner climbs into a trench on the College of the Redwoods campus. He is the project manager for Laco Associates who has been checking to see if areas in the expansion project contain active faults.