



Salvaging a broken mirror, Brooklyn Stover sorts out quake damage at her home in Boulder Creek Thursday before predicted weekend rains.

Santa Cruz quake site steels itself for worse

By Thomas D. Elias
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

BOULDER CREEK, Santa Cruz County — First it was the earthquake. Now weekend rains threaten this small mountain town of 5,000-odd residents.

"The earthquake will just be a prelude to what we are going to see if we get the rain they are telling us is coming," said Kathy Cress, owner of "Kathy's Place," a general store on the town's main road.

"People have lost their homes and their business. And now the rain might take what's left right down the hills."

At least 113 houses along the town's twisting, tree-lined roads have been destroyed since Tuesday night. Many of them withstood the first 6.9 shock, but hundreds of aftershocks as high as 4.6 in intensity have finished the job.

Boulder Creek sits barely 2 miles from the epicenter of the quake. The town is 15 miles northeast of Santa Cruz and sits astride Highway 9, the only open road between San Jose and Santa Cruz.

"This town is in real trouble," said Jim O'Hare, an Apple Computer engineer who has spent most of the week patching up damage to his home on Bear Creek Road.

His 600-pound Franklin stove, the centerpiece of his living room, was jarred more than a foot by the series of quakes, and the bed of white tiles on which it sits was turned into gravel.

A grandfather clock slid 15 feet across the carpeted floor, but amazingly didn't fall over.

The porcelain front of the toilet tank in one bathroom burst out, flooding the floors.

A short distance up the road from O'Hare a red ribbon adorned the mailbox of another house, signifying that it's unsafe for humans. The house stood empty with all its doors open. A microwave lay overturned on the kitchen floor. A potbellied stove leaned at a crazy angle in the living room. Books were piled beneath the shelves they once filled.

Onlookers gawked at fissures in the ground. Firefighters said one crack was 4 miles long and 25 feet deep.

Several residents said the earthquake instructions they received in their grammar-school days paid off Tuesday night.

"From what I can remember," said Susan Dietz, a Blue Ridge resident, "we heard and felt the rumbling as the quake started. It got worse. We dived under the kitchen table and then everything came down on top of us."

Area residents resent that their trouble got so little publicity.

Said Cress: "If the rain comes you won't be able to reach a lot of these places. There are places here people can't get to even now, so it will be a long time before we know everything that has happened."