

Winter's Wrath

Capitola Gets Swamped

Capitola-2000 1-1-03

C.J. Cannino

There's nothing like the calm before the next big storm to bring out spectators to survey the damage. Most got an eyeful at Capitola's main beach where the wreckage seemed most abundant. "This is the worst I've ever seen it in all the years I've lived here," said Gino Stefanini, a native of Watsonville. Gino and his wife Shirley were out to soak up some sun and take a look at Mother Nature's work. "There's something very intriguing about the ocean when it's like this," said Shirley.

"It just happened so fast, it was a big loud crash!" said Frank Ealy. Ealy's brother owns Zelda's on the Esplanade. On the morning of Tuesday December 17, the Zelda's morning crew was getting ready to open up for breakfast when a huge wave crashed through one of the

windows in the dining room. The wild surf tore through the railing on the outside deck of the restaurant and sent piles of logs and driftwood onto the beach. The restaurant was able to remain open, only closing that portion of the dining room, and the deck is once again open for business.

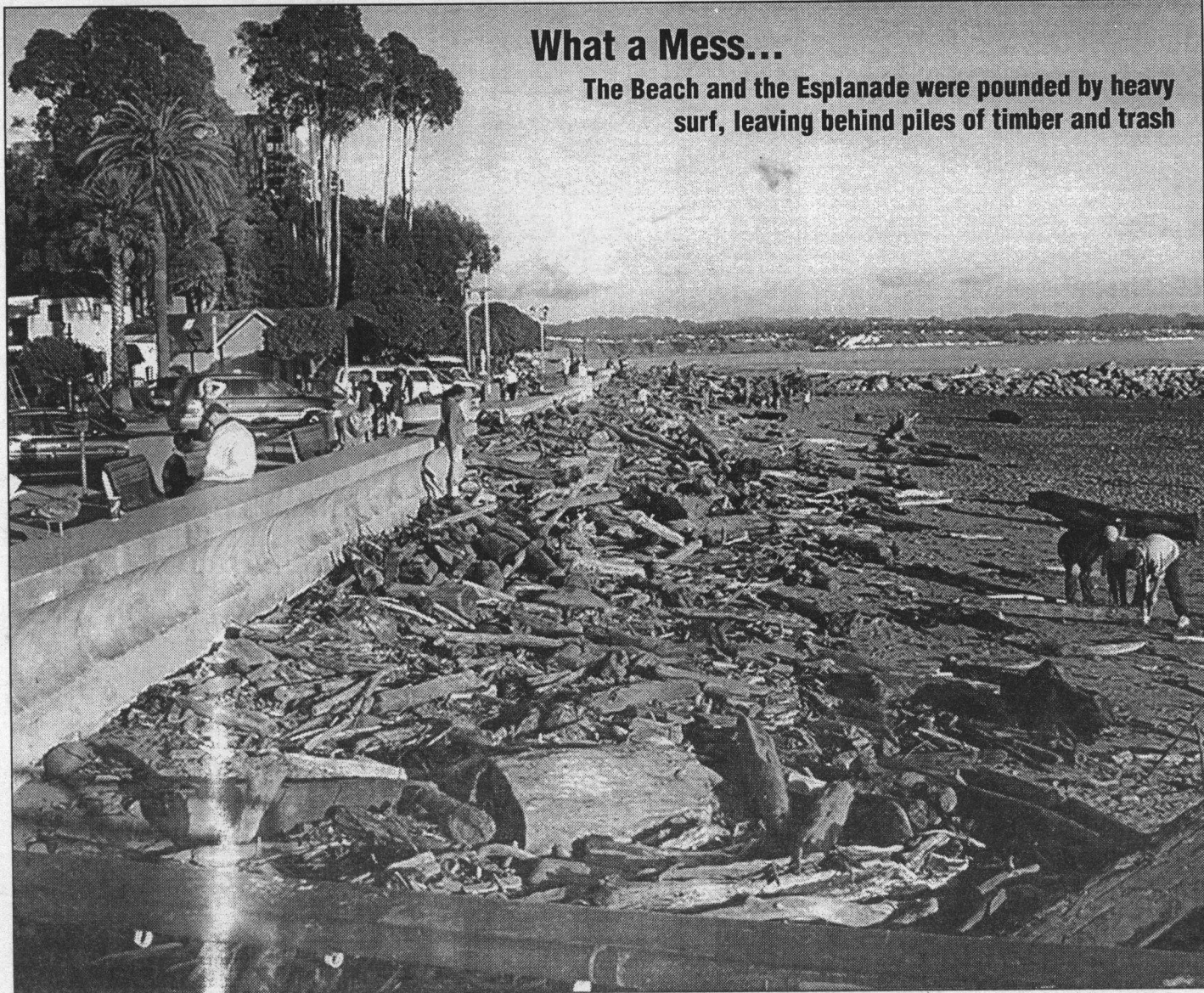
The 145-year old Capitola wharf took a real beating, 30-foot waves and 56 mile-per-hour winds ripped out 10 pilings from the base of the wharf. The venerable structure remained closed to motor traffic and open to pedestrians only until repair crews could shore up the damage.

Sand bags lay saturated beside doorways throughout the Esplanade, while hundreds of households waited for their power to be restored.

According to Bob Benjamin from the National Weather Service in Monterey, the mid-county area received approximately eight inches of rain from Friday the 13th of December through the 21st.

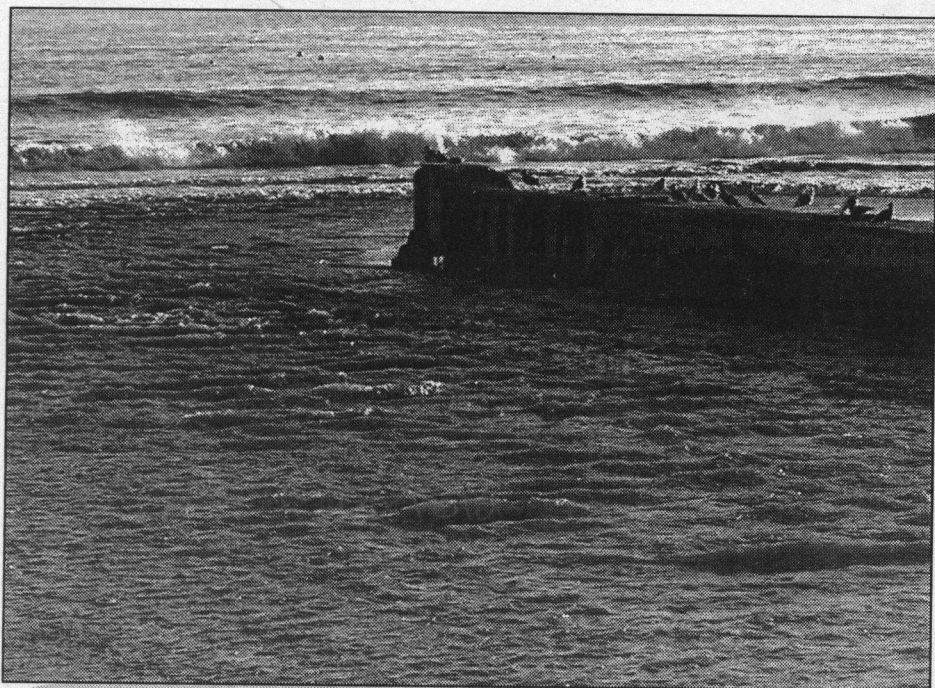
"This has probably been the worst storm in a couple of years. It was really three different storm systems back to back," said Benjamin. The forecaster said the coastal flooding was brought on by a combination of high tides coupled with high surf and winds that compounded the erosion factor. "I would say on a scale of ten this storm ranks in the eight to nine range," said Benjamin. The silver lining is that according to Benjamin, the Central Coast is above normal for precipitation so far this year.

Karen Miller, secretary for the



What a Mess...

The Beach and the Esplanade were pounded by heavy surf, leaving behind piles of timber and trash



Soquel Creek cut a wide swath as it rushed across Capitola Beach

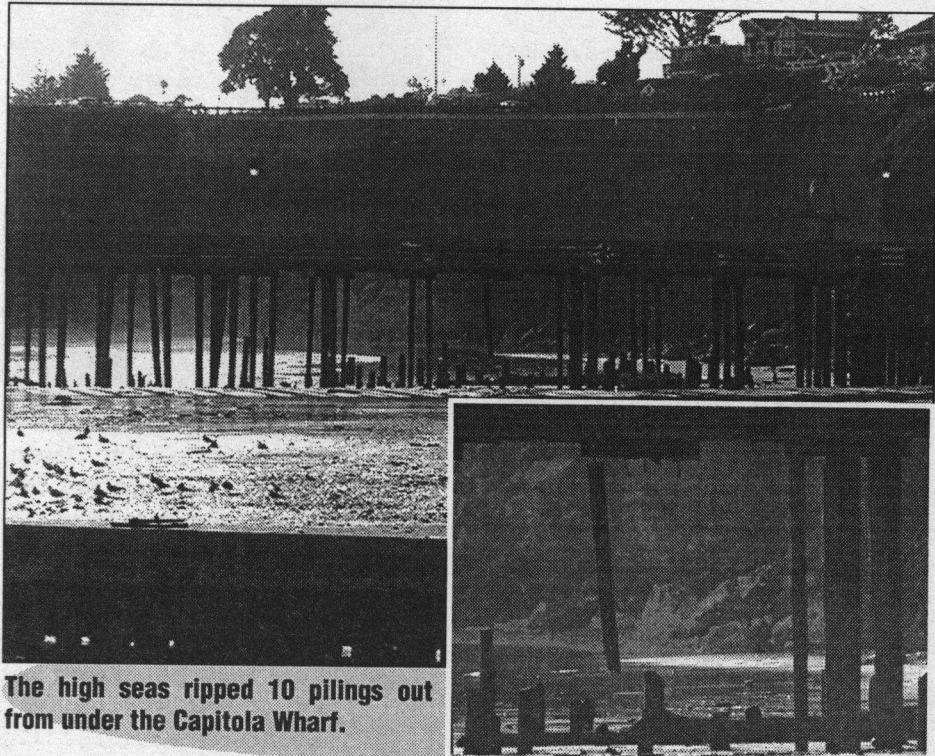
Central Fire District, said the wet week brought at least three calls a day from folks inquiring where to get sandbags. Central Fire keeps a supply of sand at all times available at the Soquel station located at 4747 Soquel Drive. Residents are welcome to fill up as many sandbags as needed; shovels and a large pile of sand and bags are on hand in back of the station. Battalion Chief Steve Van Den Heuvel said storm preparedness is essential. "Residents should have emergency supplies on hand to be self sufficient for 24 to 48 hours," he said.

Capitola Public Works Director Steve Jesberg and his crew had a busy week, but Jesberg seemed to be taking the stormy weather in stride. The city is responsible for the majority of the clean-up bill and Jesberg figures it will cost anywhere from \$70,000 to \$100,000 to repair the wharf in the spring. Jesberg said officials might be looking for other funding sources to cover the cost. "I'm not too worried about it, we've been replacing pilings on the wharf on a

regular basis," said Jesberg. But he admits with a small city budget, a large repair bill can make a big dent.

The high surf surged over the breakwater three different times over the week, causing minor flooding on the Esplanade. "It's not the worst, we've had bigger storms," said Jesberg. As he worked to unclog a storm drain plugged with wood, he was thankful there were no mudslides and grateful that only one tree came down on Park Ave.

The main beach at Capitola looked completely different, with almost no sand and piles of wood. But the public works director is confident the ocean's natural ebb and flow will bring out the wood and bring back the sand. Meanwhile, Bob Benjamin said the beginning of the big storm looked a lot like the work of El Niño because of its southerly track. "The trend would be towards a wetter than normal winter. I think we'll have an above normal rainfall year."



The high seas ripped 10 pilings out from under the Capitola Wharf.