

It was a dry year for city ... at least in comparison

It was as if someone turned off the faucet.

The 1983-84 weather year, which ends today, will go down in the books as the most abnormally normal winter in history. The bottom line will show that Watsonville received 20.13 inches of rain, pretty close to the statistical norm of 21.54 inches.

But the story was in the way it happened. Last fall, weather prophets were nearly unanimous in predicting that the winter of 1983-84 would be a repeat of the previous two winters, in which the rains were many and hard and caused extensive damage in the Central Coast area.

And that's how the season started out. Heavy rains fell in November and December, and by last Dec. 31, Watsonville had received 15.43 inches of rain. That was nearly eight inches above normal for that time of year; or, put another way, that total was reached almost two months earlier than normal.

But at the end of December, the El Niño warm water current, which had been blamed for much of the bad weather in

the two previous winters, mysteriously vanished. Just as suddenly, the rains stopped.

From January through April, Watsonville received only 4.40 inches of rain. That's a third of normal and a total that compares, in recent memory, only with the drought years of the mid-1970s. A smidgin of rain in May and June filled out the total.

The only question now is whether we're entering the beginning of a drought period. Tune in next winter for the answer.

The weather otherwise was rather unremarkable, with no extended hot or cold spells. Highest temperature recorded the past year was 98 on May 27, and the lowest was 32 the mornings of Jan. 14 and 15.