

Cold nears record low

By MARK BERGSTROM
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — If you think you've never felt the weather here so cold, you could be right.

Local weatherman Ron MacDonald said late Friday night that Santa Cruz was headed for the coldest-ever Dec. 22 overnight low and perhaps the coldest low — ever — since record-keeping was begun 100 years ago.

The coldest Dec. 22 was 26 degrees in 1948. The all-time low was 20, set on Jan. 20, 1922.

At 9 p.m. Friday, the mercury

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was already at 26 and dropping. The coldest part of the morning is right before sunrise.

Friday's high was only 43, but by 3 p.m. it was already down to 38. It was 32 at 6 o'clock and 28 at 9 o'clock.

Winter officially began at 7:07 p.m., but with temperatures like those, nobody needed a calendar to tell.

The freezing temperatures are being caused by an Arctic air mass which has descended over the Western United States.

While it was just plain cold, Friday, the icy temperatures managed to bring a few snowflakes to Santa Cruz County.

MacDonald said the snow in Santa Cruz "wasn't associated with a front, but was caused by moisture being drawn off the ocean by the cold weather passing over," he said.

The clouds held enough moisture to cause precipitation, which, he said, fell in tiny snowflakes.

The clouds did not extend far enough inland to cause snow in Scotts Valley or the Summit, MacDonald said.

Down the coast a bit, snow fell in Monterey. In Los Angeles, Palos Verdes area also received some snow.

Snow flurries also were reported in the San Joaquin Valley cities of Fresno, Madera and Bakersfield.

In Monterey, Police Department spokesman Sgt. David Jewell, said

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S.C. Sent.
12-22-90



The Associated

The recent Arctic storm covered the mountains above Monterey with a rare snowfall.

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"I've lived here 27 years, and I don't ever remember it being this cold during the day."

The cold conditions were expected to linger over the state through the weekend, but a slight warming in temperatures was forecast for today.

Heavy snow forced the closure of a heavily traveled section of Interstate 5, called the Grapevine, which connects Southern California with the San Joaquin Valley.

In Bonny Doon, Bob Sohl said the low temperature at his home Friday morning was 19 and the high that afternoon was 31. It was 26 degrees at 5:30 p.m.

Benjamin Cahill said the temperature in Happy Valley at 7 a.m. Friday was 20 degrees.

"It tried to snow, but there were just a few speckles. It was so dog-gone cold there was no frost visible in the morning. But the ground was frozen and still is is," Cahill said Friday night.

Temperatures in Watsonville ranged from a low of 29 degrees to an early-afternoon high of 40, according to Dennis Barr, a retired Air Force Weather Forecaster.

Friday's low of 24 in Santa Cruz tied the all-time record for that date. In Northern California, the temperature at Redding fell to 17 degrees Friday morning, tying the all-time record set Jan. 20, 1937, and setting a new record for Friday's date.

*The Associated Press
contributed to this report*