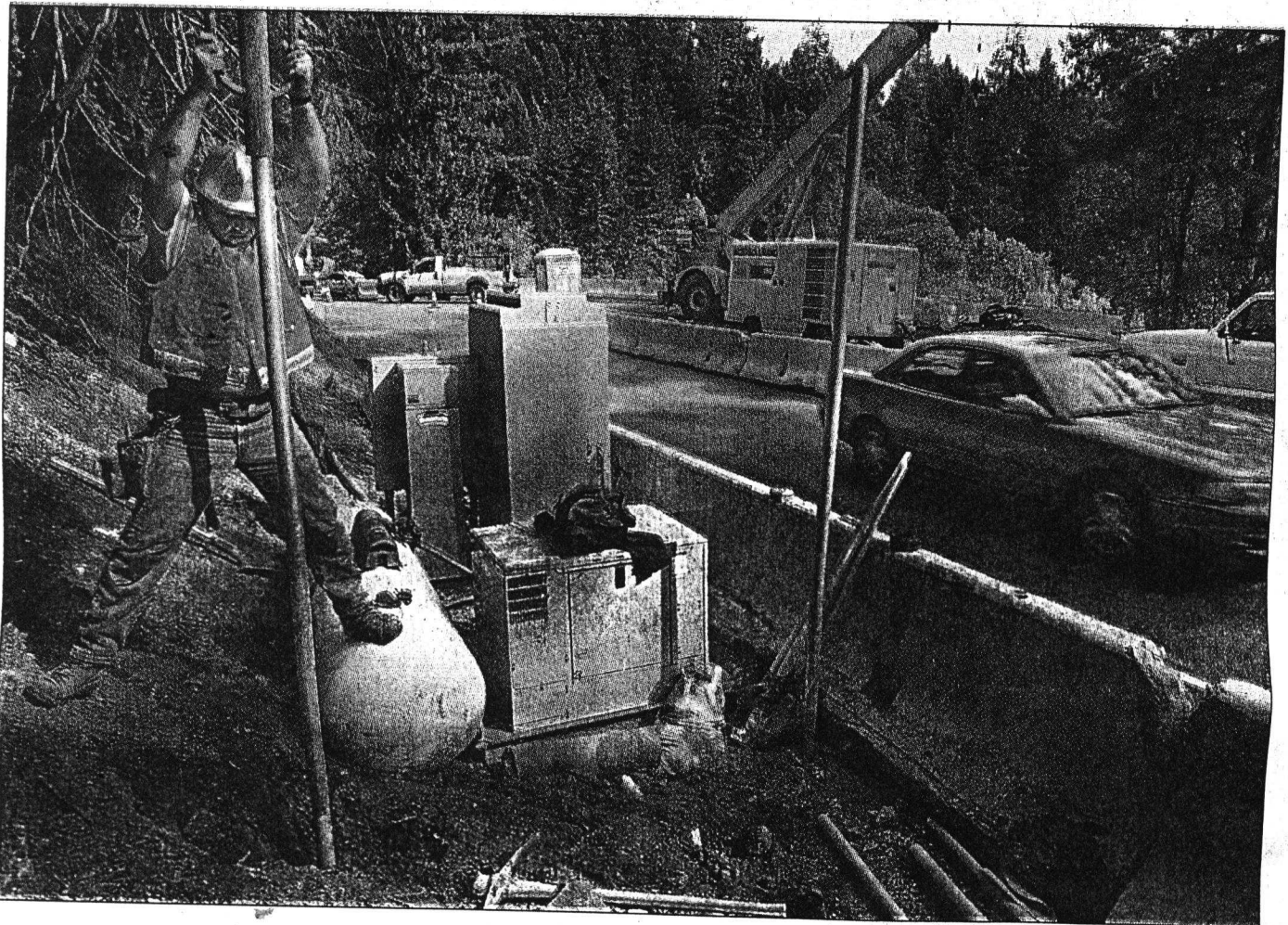


HIGHWAY 9 REOPENS



One of the first cars to pass through the Highway 9 construction closure passes Tom Borbe, who is building a fence around a new signal box. Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

One lane available for commuters

By **STETT HOLBROOK**

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

FELTON — Highway 9 is back in business. At least part of it.

After repairs closed the highway two miles south of Felton for six months, Caltrans opened one lane of the mountain road Thursday, just the way it was before it closed Aug. 21.

Traffic on opening day was light compared to the 5,000 motorists who traveled the stretch between Santa Cruz and Felton each day prior to the closure.

Felton resident Deeanne Purchase drove down just to see if it was open.

"It's such a quick way to Santa Cruz, and

it's so beautiful," she said.

While Purchase said having the road open will make driving in and out of the San Lorenzo Valley more convenient, she enjoyed walking and biking on the highway when it was closed.

"I almost wish they'd make it into a park," she said.

A slide in 1997 damaged the road and reduced it to one lane, with a stoplight controlling traffic.

The state Department of Transportation intends to open both lanes, but construction of a retaining wall will not wrap up until May, officials said.

Rain and unforeseen underground conditions delayed the Feb. 23 targeted opening.

Crews resurfaced about a quarter-mile and shored up a slide by drilling 22 holes into the hillside for tieback support. The project is expected to cost up to \$400,000 more than the initial \$1.4 million budget, said John Burke, Caltrans spokesman.

After waiting so long for the road to open, Felton resident Greg Sullivan was disappointed the one-way traffic controls were still in place.

"What did we gain?" he asked.

But as a volunteer firefighter, having access to the road is a relief, he said.

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