



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Joanne Murray is right on target as she hits her brother Patrick with a snowball on Empire Grade Tuesday.

# Snow closes Empire Grade briefly

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SANTA CRUZ — Parts of Empire Grade Road were closed briefly by snow Tuesday as widespread winter storms dumped snow as low as 1,000 feet above sea level and drenched the state in frigid rain.

San Francisco Bay Area peaks received as much as 6 inches of snow, including some peaks in the Santa Cruz Mountains. In the Sierra Nevada, more than 8 inches of snow delighted ski resort operators, while cold temperatures and storms threatened Southern California fruit

crops and closed Interstate 5 for the third time in two weeks, wire service reports said.

In Santa Cruz, the county Public Works Department closed parts of Empire Grade Road about 8:40 a.m. Tuesday at the request of the California Highway Patrol, public works spokesman

Robert Leporini said.

"There wasn't a real lot of snow, two or three inches," Leporini said. "It's not bad during the daytime. Basically it was for safety."

Leporini said the public works department sent equipment in-

cluding graders and a snowplow up Empire Grade Road, clearing the snow and applying sand to the roadway. The road was reopened at 12:46 p.m., he said.

In Bonny Doon, snow was reported at the 2,000-foot level, with an estimated 4½ inches at the California Youth Authority camp near Bonny Doon.

Highway 17 near the summit also got a dusting.

In Santa Cruz, 0.54 inches of rain Tuesday brought the yearly total to 11.10 inches, slightly above normal but far above the 3.44-inch total for this time last year.

Santa Cruz rainfall this December rose to 7.11 inches, almost two inches above normal for December.

The National Weather Service predicted scattered showers today with snowfall in the Santa Cruz Mountains as low as 1,000 to 2,000 feet. Clearing is expected Thursday morning, a weather service spokesman said, but scattered precipitation may persist through New Year's Day.

Roads on 4,209-foot Mount Hamilton, east of San Jose, were reported closed by snow Tuesday, and roads on 3,849-foot Mount Diablo east of Walnut Creek were reported treacherous because of ice and snow.

Rain and thunderstorms lashed lower elevations around the San Francisco Bay Area Monday and Tuesday, with San Francisco International Airport reporting delays in landings and takeoffs of up to two hours, according to wire reports.

San Francisco received more than an inch of rain between 4 p.m. Sunday and 4 p.m. Tuesday. Hail was reported at Livermore, Redwood City, and Mill Valley.

In the Sierra, blizzards snarled all major roadways including U.S. 50, which was closed for four

hours by heavy snow, and Interstate 80, where traffic came to a standstill along a five-mile stretch near Baxter.

The National Weather Service issued a snow advisory for the Sierra Nevada north of Yosemite.

In Southern California, the snow level had dropped to 3,500, dusting the San Gabriels above Los Angeles with snow, according to the Associated Press.

A squall hit Long Beach Harbor Tuesday with winds of 60 mph, the wire service said, but there were few reports of damage.

The storm was blamed for a chain-reaction accident on Interstate 10 near Colton that involved more than a dozen cars. It was not known whether any motorists were injured, the Associated Press said.

Interstate 5, the "Grapevine" linking Northern and Southern California, was closed by snow for a few hours 75 miles north of Los Angeles. By late afternoon Tuesday, the CHP reported the road reopened but with poor visibility, occasional snow and rain, and slow traffic.

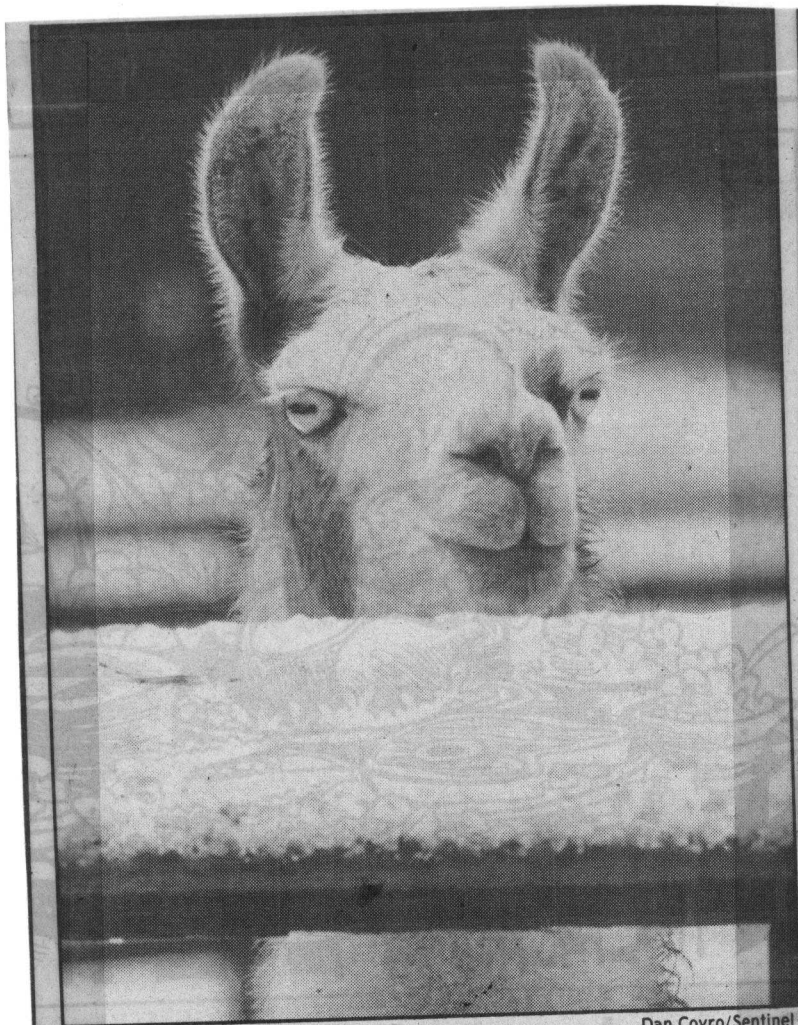
The closure was the third for Interstate 5 since a week before Christmas, when a series of cold snaps and storms began to move through the area.

Area rainfall reports for 24 hours ending at 6 p.m. Tuesday and including the season's totals (since July 1) and those of last year at this time, are as follows:

	24 hr.	Sea.	'86 to date
Aptos	.54	10.01	3.69
Ben Lomond	3.20	24.43	5.70
Bonny Doon	.61	20.98	5.71
Boulder Creek	.92	20.22	4.62
Capitola	.87	15.47	2.94
Graham Hill	.85	17.07	4.49
Happy Valley	.55	15.35	4.10
Larkin Valley	.78	8.82	NA
La Selva Beach	.60	10.44	3.57
Lompico	.60	16.68	5.25
Natural Bridges	.60	10.64	3.60
Rio del Mar	.58	8.09	3.08
Santa Cruz	.54	11.10	3.44
Soquel	.41	12.53	NA
Scotts Valley	.72	16.30	5.25
Watsonville	.59	7.54	NA

na — not available





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Tuesday's snow seems to have startled this llama in his corral on Empire Grade.