

Coal cars leave track near La Selva Beach

By ANNA MARIA BASQUEZ
Sentinel staff writer

LA SELVA BEACH — Three train cars packed with 100 tons of coal each derailed Monday because of what neighbors and authorities believe was rain-soaked earth.

"I could see those things rocking back and forth every time the train went by and I thought, 'Man, that thing is going to tip over one of these days,'" said Jock Lopes, whose back porch overlooks the site in the 1200 block of San Andreas Road. "I'm glad it went that way and not this way."

The cause of the derailment just after 1 p.m. was still being investigated, said Union Pacific's on-site manager, Andy Gonzalez. No one was hurt in the accident.

"It appears it's weather-related," said Chad Wilbourn, a supervisor for Union Pacific Transportation Co., which owns the cars. "It's the first real good rain we've had."

Union Pacific crewmen were planning to work with cranes through the night to clear the derailment.

The wreck lifted and twisted the tracks.

"Somebody came by and told us it was because the ground gave way underneath it and the asphalt caved in," said Leslie Hague, assistant

manager at the nearby KOA Kampgrounds of America.

Lopes said he heard a ground-shaking noise and a shriek he assumed was the front of the train breaking away from the cars.

On-lookers stopped throughout the afternoon.

"I've seen this train 1,000 times before and I've never seen it flip," said Derek Hague, who attends nearby Renaissance High School. "That's crazy."

The train runs three times a week from Watsonville to Davenport, hauling coal north and cement south, along with other freight.

There were eight other cars, many carrying plywood, behind the derailed cars.

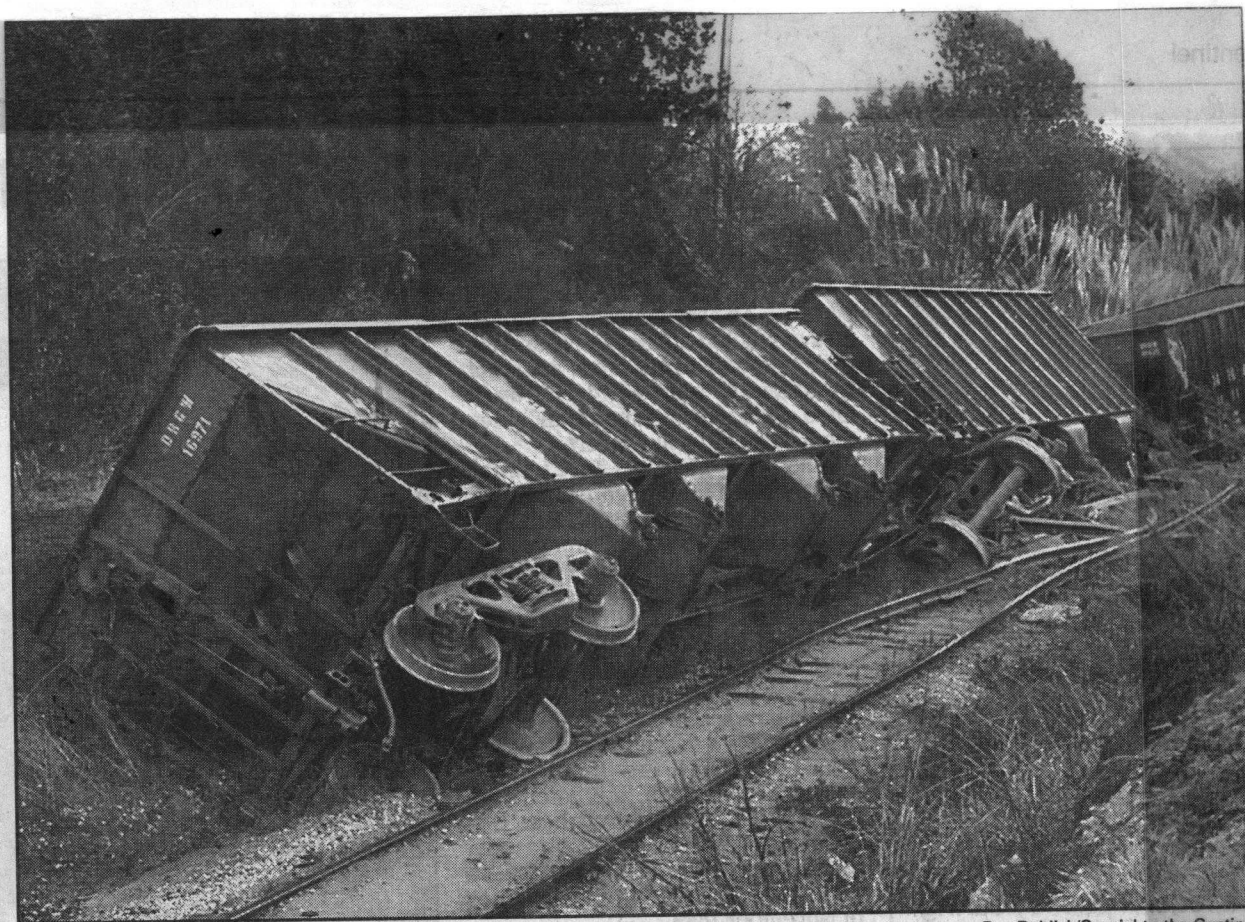
Train derailments are not new to the stretch of tracks. One well-remembered mishap was in 1992 when nine Southern Pacific cars derailed near New Brighton Beach Park.

The accidents at that time sparked accusations the railroad wasn't maintaining tracks well enough.

Union Pacific has since bought Southern Pacific.

Last year, just up the line, the tracks were washed out by the heavy rains, closing the run for a time.

On Monday, Mitch Meyer brought



Ray Doblick/Special to the Sentinel

No one was injured when the cars left the track near Renaissance High School.

his 5-year-old son to the scene.

"He's a big train fan so I brought him right down here," said Meyer.

Meyer said he couldn't guess how they'd clean up the mess, but his son, Colby Meyer ventured a guess.

"I would guess the breakdown train is going to come," he said. Just like in his toy set.