

# Snow is no stranger to Santa Cruz Mountains

ONE SNOW photograph each winter is usually enough, but this winter's spate of snow flurries forces me to drag out another. This one was taken on the Santa Cruz side of the Summit in the 1930s. Perhaps there's an antique automobile expert out there who can examine the vehicles and help me narrow the date.

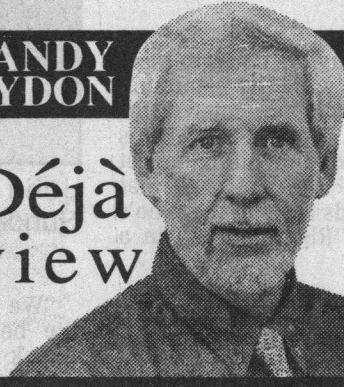
Snow on the beach at Santa Cruz was pretty unusual, but it was (and is) a regular event at higher elevations in the coastal mountains. Sebastian Vizcaino, the first Spaniard to chronicle a Monterey Bay region winter, wrote of the snow that greeted him on the morning of Jan. 1, 1603. From his campsite just above the beach at Monterey he looked east and north to see all the mountains so covered with snow that "they resembled the volcanoes of Mexico." The overnight temperatures were cold enough to freeze his water buckets into solid blocks of ice.

Snow on top of regional mountains rarely received more than a brief mention in 19th century newspapers. It was only when the snow fell and stuck on valley floors, as it did in 1862 and 1880, that reporters went out to interview residents about it.

So what is it that has transformed mountain snowfall from a yawner to an event? One obvious difference is the increase of year-round residents in the

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view



mountains. Even when I was a kid, Felton and Boulder Creek pretty much closed down during the winter months. During the 1950s my grandmother was one of only two people living the year-round in Butano Canyon up behind Pescadero, and everybody thought she was a little eccentric for doing so. She was often cut off from the outside world for days at a time. Houses in the Santa Cruz Mountains were built with single walls because no one lived there in the winter.

The biggest change, of course, is the thousands of folks who drive across those mountains twice a day to jobs in Santa Clara County and points north. Daily commuting across the mountains is a very recent phenomenon. It may



Carolyn Swift collection

Road crew clears snow on the old Glenwood Highway in the 1930s.

sound astonishing here in 1996, but in the not too distant past, people lived where they worked. No kidding. Now we live where we want and work where we can find it. And a snowfall in between becomes a major problem.

The mountains and the weather have not changed; We have. Like it or not, there will always be snowstorms in the mountains. It is my duty as a historian to remind you of such things. And while I'm at it, perhaps I can pass along a little advice about winter in the Santa

Cruz Mountains: Quit whining and deal with it.

*If you have a photograph you would like to see used in this column, or one that you would like some help identifying, send a good photocopy (color copies are best) to Déjà View, Sandy Lydon, care of the Santa Cruz County Sentinel, 207 Church St., Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060. E-mail address: [salydon@aol.com](mailto:salydon@aol.com).*

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