



Dennis A. Noonan

Restless Pacific builds strength before large wave battered Capitola this morning.

Wave disrupts repose of Capitola Esplanade

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CAPITOLA — The almost round-the-clock effort to reopen storm-damaged Zelda's restaurant on the Capitola Esplanade continued early this morning when workers looked through the broken windows and noticed the swell starting to build.

They quickly nailed plywood over the window frames, just in case, for, as co-owner Ron Ely said, "The swell was high for that time (5:30) of the morning."

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At 7 o'clock a giant wave crested on otherwise calm, battleship gray water.

An early-morning stroller was up on Wharf Road when he saw the wave form, then crash up over the end of the Capitola Wharf and pound into the buildings on the Esplanade.

The giant wave lashed against the plywood just put up at Zelda's. Foamy water poured in from around the edges.

Water shot through spaces between the buildings on the Esplanade and crashed up over the concrete wall along the beach. The wave caught a large dumpster alongside the Bandstand restaurant and pushed it across the street, banging one parked city truck against another.

The water rushed up into the yards of the Six Sisters houses and up San Jose Avenue to Lawn Way.

Men and women repairing the damage to the Esplanade from high seas a week and a half ago were perplexed.

There was no rain, no gusty winds. High tide was due in a half hour, but it was to be only 5.5, considerably less than the near seven-foot tides of the Jan. 27 storm.

Big sets continued to build on the bay after that giant wave. The sea grew stormy without a storm. The weather front which had been predicted to hit Wednesday moved to the north, supposedly sparing Santa Cruz County from another beating by the rain and wind.

Owners and workers returned inside the buildings on the Esplanade to survey damage. Spectators lined the Stockton Avenue bridge to watch as every now and then a breaker would catch the end of the Capitola Wharf, sending water spewing out the windows of the restaurant, still exposed to the spray by a wall which was knocked down on Jan. 27.

People milled around on the sidewalk across from the Esplanade, not quite believing all the water and debris in the street.

Just before 7:45, the owners and workers came running out of the restaurants as a second giant wave shook the Esplanade.

Those forced to flee the buildings watched the waves for a few minutes. Caution prevailed.

When Ely went back in Zelda's he looked at the water on the new carpet which, along with new wallpaper, had been put in on Wednesday.

He said his restaurant might have been all right had the replacement glass arrived on time. "It's supposed to get here sometime today," Ely explained.

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There was no immediate estimate of new damage from this morning's freak waves. Damage from the Jan. 27 storm totalled nearly \$1 million to the Esplanade and wharf.

Total damage in the county from that storm was some \$13 million, enough for President Ronald Reagan to declare the county a disaster area on Wednesday.

That declaration will have the greatest impact on private property owners, who now can apply for federal loans to repair their homes or businesses.

Ben Angove of the county administrative office said this morning he had been told a disaster office will be set up in the county, possibly as early as Tuesday to handle claims from Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties.

Many of the homes damaged Jan. 27 were along Los Olas Drive near Seacliff State Park, and, again this morning, residents were sealed in by high surf.

"We had waves up over our decks again," said Las Olas resident Peter Fields. "We were caught unaware. Most of us have our cars down here so we'll have to hoof it out," he said.

It was hard to tell if any of the homes suffered new damage because of all the debris and destruction remaining from the last storm, Fields explained.

But, he said, "I can see the waves right now breaking over the Cement Ship and pier at Seacliff."

At 10 this morning, Chief Ranger Larry Cermak said waves, some as high as 20 feet, were still crashing over the ship and pier. Some planks were pulled from the pier, but he said the volunteer repair work down last weekend probably saved the pier from collapse.

There were no immediate reports of further damage to structures from Beach Drive to Aptos Seascape.

The National Weather Service is calling for partly cloudy skies through Friday. A small craft warning has been posted for the bay for hazardous seas with 10- to 15-foot swells and for winds of 20 to 40 knots later in the day. High tide Friday is set for 5.5 and 5.4 on Saturday.

Although the tide won't reach the proportions of a week and a half ago, beachfront residents learned something this morning: They can't let down their guard.

"We didn't have the rain or the wind, but the bottom line is still the same: We're sealed in," said Fields. "We're just out walking walking around. It's been a trying winter."