

Mother Nature puts on a show

By MARK BERGSTROM

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SANTA CRUZ — It was an electrifying night for some; a bothersome one for others as a thunderstorm hurled lightning bolts and peals of thunder at Santa Cruz County.

The storm was the talk of the town this morning, with many comparing notes on the spectacular show and others complaining about their lack of sleep.

Powerful thunder cells, spawned by a combination of warm Indian Summer weather and moisture moving up from Mexico, moved in just before 2 a.m. and lit up the skies and shook the ground for more than two hours.

Lightning strikes started about a dozen small brush and timber fires in the county, according to Carl Kent, information officer for the state Department of Forestry in Felton.

In all, 27 strikes were recorded overnight in the county, he said. No injuries were reported, although at least one home was struck by a bolt. Eric Fernstrom reported the peak of the roof of his Scotts Valley home was hit, causing minor damage.

Lightning also struck Central Fire District's Thurber Lane Station while firefighters were out on a call. They discovered the strike when they returned to find the smoke detector sounding and the electricity meter blown up. The bolt apparently hit the service line and traveled down to the meter.

Fires were reported in Hinkley Basin above Nisene Marks State Park, on Laurel Glen Road, Bear Creek Road, Smith Grade and on Jamison Creek Road above Boulder Creek.

A helicopter was called in this morning to dump buckets of water on three fires which merged off Jamison Creek Road in a remote canyon not far from Monday's Pine Mountain forest fire in Big Basin State Park.

Firefighters were pulled off the Pine Mountain fire because of lightning danger

Life isn't easy for a weatherman

SANTA CRUZ — Ron MacDonald is a pretty good judge of rain. As the official record-keeper for Santa Cruz, he must keep a keen eye on his gauge.

This morning, he thought his eyes were being played tricks on him when he checked the gauge and found water up to the two-inch mark.

His eyes weren't playing tricks; but one of his children was. A bit of detective work and MacDonald found that the little jokester had filled up the gauge with the garden hose. To maintain his impeccable accuracy, MacDonald dumped out his rain gauge and refilled it with water collected overnight in a nearby bucket. It measured .11 of an inch.

early this morning and then later were sent to help out on the rash of new fires.

Kent said the Pine Mountain fire was expected to be completely controlled sometime this afternoon. The fire, which broke out early Monday night, was started by a tree falling on a power line.

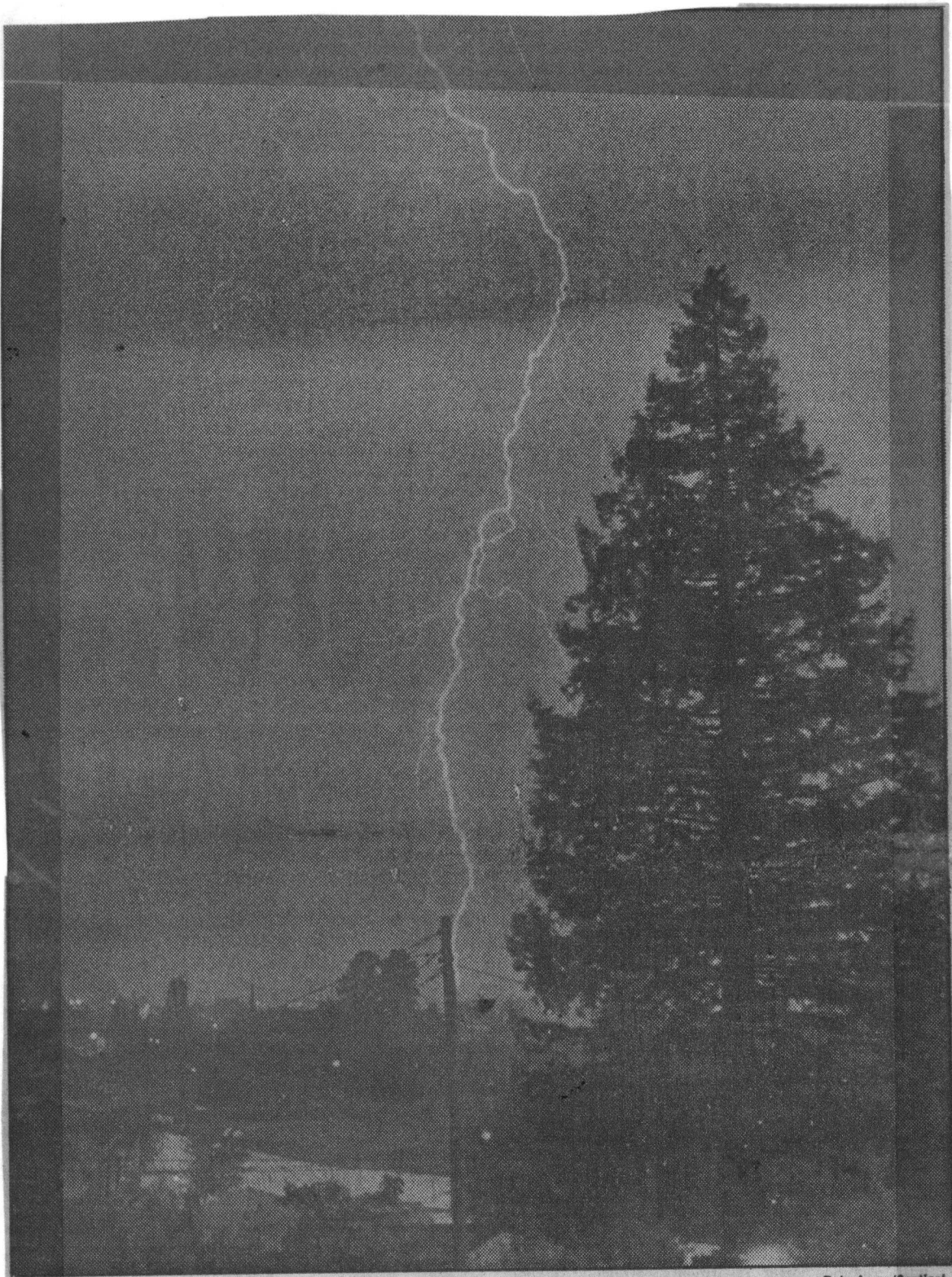
The Department of Forestry was planning to fly reconnaissance flights over the mountain today to look for more lightning-caused fires.

Some may not be found for days, Kent said. "They will smoulder for days, going underground or cooking in the trees. Then as the temperature goes back up and the humidity drops, the fire breaks out," he explained.

The unusual lightning display brought out brave crowds, including a band at the end of Rockview Drive, who "oohed" and "aahed" as if it were the Fourth of July. The group took cover only after rain soaked them to the skin.

At times during the peak of the storm,

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Pete Amos/Sentinel

A lightning bolt illuminates sky over Monterey Bay at 3 o'clock this morning.

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The sky was lit up by both flashes and long fingers of lightning. Mark Douglas reported that just before the power to his home on Pine Flat Road in Bonny Doon went out about 3:15 a.m., there was a period of about 15 minutes of continuous thunder.

Scattered power outages were reported throughout the northern part of the county. Inoperative signals plus rain-slicked roads made the drive to work difficult this morning.

A minor injury accident near Blake Hammond Manor blocked both directions of travel on Highway 9 during this morning's commute. Driving through the San Lorenzo Valley was doubly difficult because of the slick highway and thick fog which cut visibility to less than one-quarter

mile.

Periods of heavy rain accompanied the electrical storm, with amounts ranging from .02 of an inch in Aptos to .40 of an inch on Graham Hill Road. It was the first measurable rainfall of the season, which began July 1.

The National Weather Service reported that the storm brought thunder, lightning and a smattering of rain over a wide area from King City to Mount Tamalpais in Marin County. The storm provided a spectacular show over San Francisco's Golden Gate and Bay bridges.

Forecasters this morning were calling for a chance of showers this morning with a high of 82 for the Santa Cruz area. Skies were expected to clear this afternoon and remain sunny on Thursday.

The weather service said a thunderstorm of such intensity is unusual for this

time of year. Most electrical storms occur over the Central Coast area during winter or early spring.

The last summertime thunderstorm was on Aug. 19, 1984, according to Santa Cruz weatherman Ron MacDonald. A storm on July 22, 1979, was of about the same intensity as this morning's storm, MacDonald reported.

Rainfall reports for 24 hours ending at 8 a.m. today, and including the season's totals (since July 1) and those of last year at this time, are as follows:

	24 Hrs.	Season	Last Year
Aptos	.02	.06	.06
Ben Lomond	.26	.26	.25
Bonny Doon	.08	.08	.06
Capitola	.18	.18	.11
Graham Hill	.40	.40	.70
Natural Bridges	.10	.10	.41
Pine Flat	.10	.10	.15
Santa Cruz	.11	.11	.23