

The Rainfall Report

San Jose, California

6 November 2023

*A dark
and stormy
forecast*

Umunhum under overcast
*Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve
Santa Clara County*



Wet from the west
Bald Mountain

A dark and stormy forecast

Last week, the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) — part of a cooperative project of the government weather agencies of Canada, Mexico and the United States — announced in its weekly report that for the first time in more than 2½ years, nowhere in California is under drought conditions. On this date a year ago, more than 90% of the state was in at least “severe drought,” the mid-range of conditions that are classified as “exceptional” at worst.

This is remarkable for several reasons, not least of which is that California is a state where there simply is no precipitation at all in most places from April to November, so drought is a normal feature of the climate. Nineteen of the 24 years of this century have been drought years in California.

Precipitation records have been kept for only the last 128 years, but in that period the drought from December 2011 through March 2017 was the longest, and the years of 2011-2014 were the driest.

Last winter, for whatever reason, the storms in the Gulf of Alaska lined up and swept into the state one after another. Rarely a week passed without a new one. Tulare Lake reappeared in its depression in the southern San Joaquin Valley after masquerading for decades as farmland. On April 1, the Sierra snowpack was at 200% of normal for that date only the fourth time since 1950. Mammoth Mountain, in the eastern Sierra, and Palisades at Tahoe were still open for skiing on the Fourth of July.

Two days ago, the Climate Prediction Center, part of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, forecast that this winter will be an *El Niño* winter, named for a periodic warming of the Northern Pacific around Christmas, *El Niño's* birthday, which in California usually results in higher-than-normal precipitation, though not necessarily more snow. The center said there's a 75%-85% chance of a strong *El Niño* effect with a 30% possibility that it may be the strongest on record.

There have already been two recent half-foot snowfalls at Lake Tahoe. As you can see in this newsletter, the storm clouds were rolling in today over the Santa Cruz Mountains, which separate the Santa Clara Valley, where I live, from the ocean. I decided to drive up to the top of Mount Umunhum, which I can see from my house, and get in 'em.

It was chilly. A bit damp. Nice.

The clouds were climbing up the western slope from the Pacific and then tumbling over the ridgetop and rolling down toward the valley where they re-evaporated.

Hopefully it's a foreshadowing of another wet winter to come.



Mission
Peak

SJC Mineta San Jose
International Airport

Downtown

Valley view
San Jose

Notes on photos

UMUNHUM UNDER OVERCAST — [The name of this 3,486-foot / 1,063-meter mountain](#) almost hums itself. It means “resting place of the hummingbird” in the language of the Ohlone people, who inhabited this region before Spanish explorers and missionaries arrived 1769. The [Amah Mutsun Tribe](#), whose 600 members can trace their lineage to ancestors living within the sphere of influence of either [Mission San Juan Bautista](#) or [Mission Santa Cruz](#), use the peak for their own religious ceremonies. But the building at the top, known as “the cube,” is all that’s left of the Almaden Air Force Station, which occupied the peak beginning in 1957. It was one of a series of radar stations built along the West Coast to detect the approach of Soviet bombers as far out as 250 miles over the Pacific. The cube was the base of the world’s largest rotating radar antenna. The base was closed in 1980 and the land purchased by the [Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District](#) six years later. Because of the clean-up of hazardous material left by the Air Force, the public was not able to access the peak until 2017. The hiking trail that now reaches the top is a spur from the planned 550-mile / 890-kilometer [Bay Area Ridge Trail](#) that, when finished, will completely circle San Francisco Bay and connect 75 parks and open spaces. Since 1989, about 400 miles / 640 km of the trail have been completed. The cube remains as a protected historic site but the interior is sealed to public entry.

WET FROM THE WEST — Bald Mountain (2,387 ft / 726 m) lies just south of Mount Umunhum and is partly obscured by the clouds on the right rolling in from the ocean. Farther south behind Bald Mountain is Loma Prieta Peak, which lies just east of the San Andreas Fault at the epicenter of the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, better known to most Americans as the World Series Earthquake. That magnitude 6.9 earthquake — the first major earthquake Emily and I felt after moving to California — killed 69 people and injured 3,757. It struck minutes before the third game of the World Series between the San Francisco Giants and Oakland A’s was to begin at Candlestick Park, so in a sense the earthquake was televised to a national audience. The last two games of the series were postponed until the Bay Area could mourn and regroup.

VALLEY VIEW — To look east from Umunhum is to look across the Santa Clara Valley, which most of the world knows as Silicon Valley, and across the city that fills most of it: San Jose. The southern end of San Francisco Bay is just out of sight to the left of the airport as is Levi’s Stadium, where the 49ers play. Mission Peak (2,520 ft / 768 m) stands above the city of Fremont, in Alameda County, and is popular with hikers and hang glider pilots. It’s located within the [East Bay Regional Park District](#) and gets its name from [Mission San José](#), founded in 1797 as one of the 21 Spanish missions strung northward along El Camino Real from Mission San Diego in what was then Alta California, upper California, as opposed to the Mexican state of Baja (lower) California.

AUTUMN TREE — The Bay Area is not a place people think of for its fall color scene although many suburban neighborhoods, which were landscaped with non-native trees and shrubs when they were developed, do have some spectacular leaves. [Check this out](#). Still, out in the natural boonies, you can run across a tree like this one on Mount Umunhum Road.



Autumn tree
Mount Umunhum Road