

# THE HOLIDAY HERALD

2 January 2010

San Francisco Bay Area

*Winter settles in*



Sunset, Pigeon Point Lighthouse, San Mateo County

## Happy New Year

Winter has come to the Bay Area.

Unlike much of America, which imports its winter from Canada, we import ours from the Gulf of Alaska in the form of fog and rain for the coast and Central Valley and snow for the Sierra. It's the time of

year our part of the world turns green after the drought of summer.

Like everywhere, there are people who curse the wet and gray of this season.

**– Continued on 3rd page**



# Where these pictures were shot

These pictures were shot on three separate drives from my home in San Jose, Santa Clara County, during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day weekend. All locations are with 75 minutes' drive.

**Drive 1, Monday, Dec. 28:** Big Basin, UC Santa Cruz and the coast of Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties.

**Drive 2: Tuesday, Dec. 29:** Golden Gate National Recreational Area and Marin Headlands of Marin County.

**Drive 3: Saturday, Jan. 2:** Año Nuevo State Park on the San Mateo County Coast.

## Place name translations from Spanish:

*San Jose* (St. Joseph), *Santa Clara* (St. Claire), *Santa Cruz* (Holy Cross), *Año Nuevo* (New Year), *San Mateo* (St. Matthew), *San Francisco* (St. Francis), *San Pablo* (St. Paul).

*Marin* was the name of the chief of the Coast Miwok Indian tribe at the time of Spanish exploration.

# Happy New Year

– **From Page 1**

But we have enjoyed the peace and quiet of this week, the first time in several years all three of us have had it off together.

Emily has been watching black and white movies on TV that she recites the lines to and Gordini has been treating us to meals he learned to cook after his first quarter in a college apartment. He favors garlic, thyme and olive oil, and we are rechecking the family tree for previously undiscovered evidence of Italian heritage.

Come July when there hasn't been a cloud in the sky for two months and won't be for at least four more, there will be showers and toilet flushes for all – those who curse the winter and those who enjoy it as the birth of the New Year.

---



**Family walks into a burned-out but still-living coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) more than 1,000 years old. These trees are thinner, but taller cousins of the giant sequoias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) that live in the Sierra Nevada. Fog drip is a major source of water for these trees. Redwoods that live above 2,200 feet in the mountains – the fog level – or live on the drier, inland side of the coast ranges are not nearly as tall as the 350-plus foot trees that live on the ocean side of the mountains, which are the world's tallest trees. Both sequoia species live more than 2,000 years. Big Basin Redwoods State Park, Santa Cruz County.**

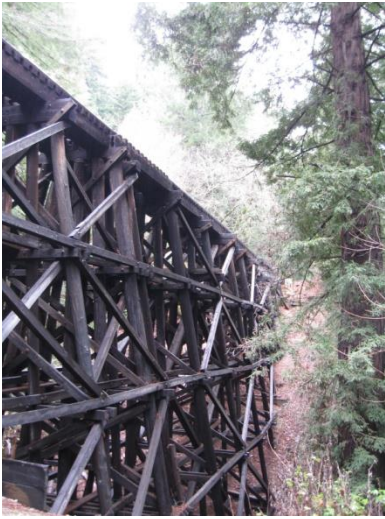


**Clouds and fog, Santa Cruz Mountains, Santa Clara-Santa Cruz County border**



**The University of California opened its Santa Cruz campus in 1965 in the redwood-forested mountains above the beach town of Santa Cruz. It now has 16,000 students. On the left is the student union building in Quarry Plaza and below is a campus parking garage. They illustrate how the campus architecture is integrated with the natural surroundings. With most people gone during the winter break, deer have reclaimed the campus.**





**<<< Railroad trestle, Santa Cruz, Big Trees & Pacific Railway, Santa Cruz Mountains, Santa Cruz County.**

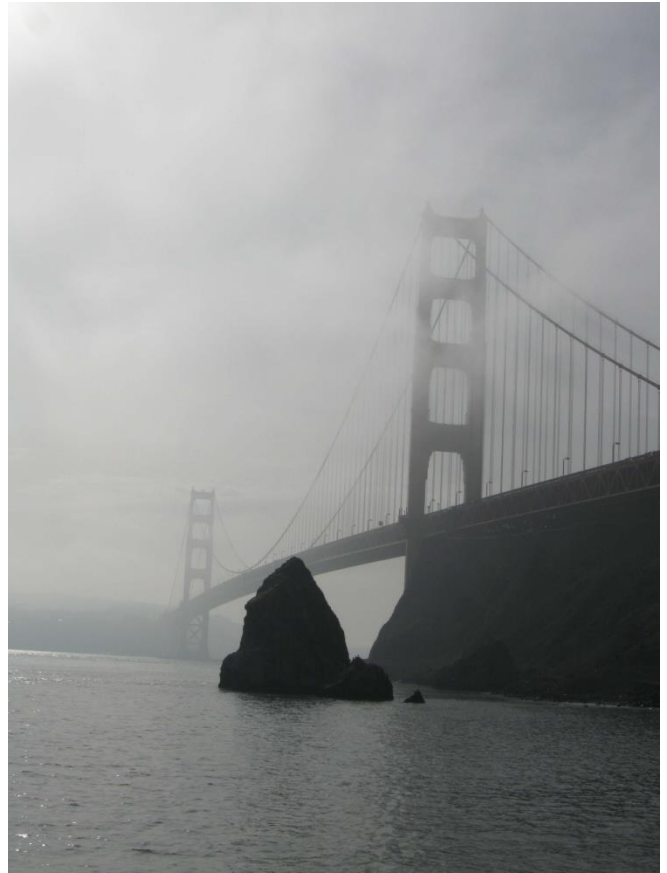
**Waves crash into rocks on Rodeo Beach, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Marin County. >>>**



**Winter waves bring surfers to Rodeo Beach, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Marin County.**



**Ship passes through the Golden Gate and into San Francisco Bay, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Marin Headlands, Marin County.**



**Two views of the Golden Gate Bridge: from the Marin Headlands on the Pacific side (left), and from Fort Baker inside the Gate (right), Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Marin County.**

# Tough hombres

In 1603 Spanish explorer Sebastián Vizcaíno named the point of land he discovered on the California coast *Punta Año Nuevo* for the day he spotted it – New Year’s Day. But what is now Año Nuevo State Park on this spit of land also has another, more contemporary connection to the first day of the year.

This is the season that more than 5,000 northern elephant seals return from six months at sea to give birth and mate on the beach. Forty-nine pups, each about 75 pounds, had been born as of Jan. 1 since the first females landed just before Christmas. About 2,000 will be born before the season ends in March.

They are beginning difficult lives. Most pups will grow to between 250 and 300 pounds by a month after birth, nursing on milk that is 55% fat, when they will awaken one morning to discover they have been abandoned by their mothers. The moms have mated while nursing and begun a pregnancy that will conclude next New Year’s. They must return to the sea to eat after their four-week fast.

During this period, visitors to the park must travel in groups accompanied by rangers for their own safety. Male seals, the ones with the distinctive snout that gives the species their name, weigh up to



**This young male, about 2,500 pounds, already bears scars on his neck from fighting. All males develop this scar collar.**

2½ tons – 5,000 pounds apiece – are as big as a compact car and can move faster over the sand dunes than a human can run. They fight vicious, bloody battles with each other to control a harem of as many as 40 females, each weighing 800-1,600 pounds.

The seals don’t seem to mind humans nearby and certainly don’t see us as prey, but it would be very dangerous to find yourself between two guys who suddenly take a fancy to the babe sunning herself on the dune over there.

– **Continued on next page**

# Tough hombres

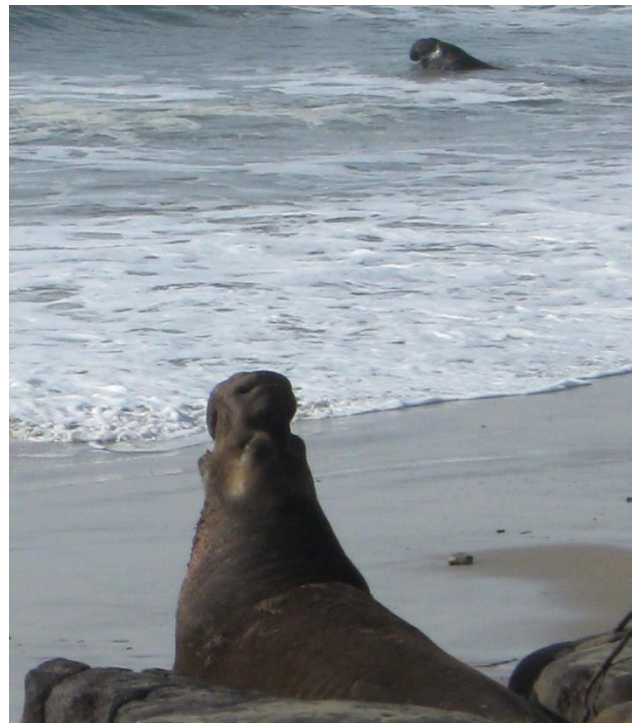
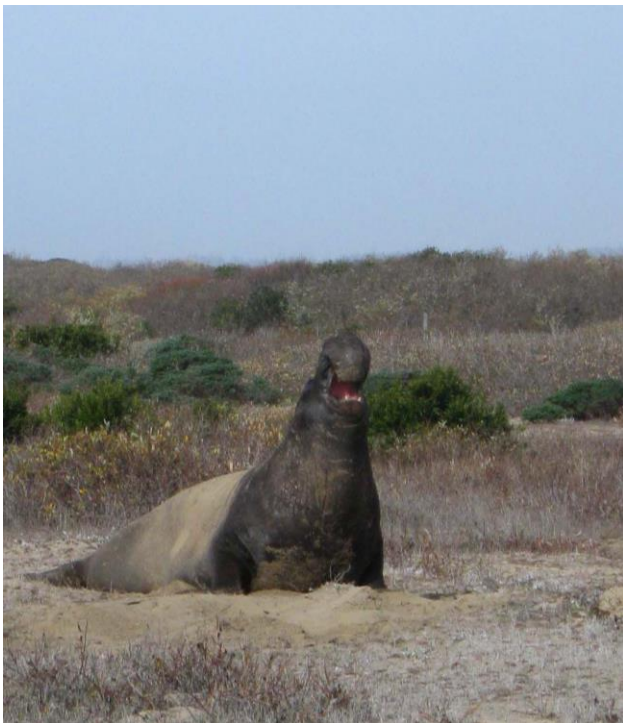
– *Continued from previous page*

It takes the weaners about a month without food before they get the courage to venture into the water for their first swim and to search for food. Half of them will not make it back to the beach, falling victim to 30-foot great white sharks that also congregate at Año Nuevo this time of year. But those fortunate enough to learn to swim, hunt and elude sharks and killer whales until April will head to sea. The females migrate west, past Hawaii, before returning in summer to molt. It is the first of two 8,000-mile round trips they will make each year from Año Nuevo. The males migrate north to Alaskan waters, a 10,000-mile roundtrip they will also make twice a year.

Eighty-five percent of the seals born this month will not live to their fourth birthday, sexual maturity, but the ones

who live a full life can expect to live about 14 years for males, 20 for females. Only five percent of the adult males will fight well enough to mate. Seals will dive as deep as 6,000 feet during their months at sea to feed on small sharks, skates, rays and squid, and they will stay under water for up to two hours while feeding.

As difficult as their lives are, the elephant seals are in much better shape than they once were. When Vizcaíno discovered Año Nuevo, hundreds of thousands of the seals cruised the Pacific. By 1892, seal hunting for their blubber, oil and meat had reduced the population to a colony of 200 on a Mexican island off Baja California. Mexico banned seal hunting in 1922 and the United States followed a year later. The first seals returned to Año Nuevo in 1955, the first pup was born there in 1961 and the colony grows every year.



**The bull on the left is far inland from the females and has little chance of mating this year. The bull on the right bellows at the bull in the surf as a warning to stay away.**