

MUDSLIDE

On October 15-17, a thousand-year event (75-degree ocean temperatures and a swirling low-pressure system) created dense, black rainclouds that soaked the dry mountainsides of Southern California, closing Interstate 5 through the iconic Grapevine, and later causing an eight-mile-wide wall of mud to slide down the steep slope above Highway 58 between Mojave and Tehachapi. This second mudslide engulfed 200 vehicles, including cattle trucks, horse carriers, tour buses full of passengers, semis, and cars.

Unfortunately, it appears that one driver was killed, and a trucker is still missing. The highway was a gigantic mess that took days to clean up after people and animals had been rescued. Elsewhere, the Central Valley received huge amounts of rain in a very short time. Streets flooded in Mendota. Dry washes and ditches everywhere suddenly surged from the downpour, several inches in one hour.

Around the same time, yours truly was driving home from Sedona, Arizona, but fortunately was just a few hours behind the worst of the storms. Out of a clear blue sky in the middle of the Mojave Desert, I saw dark clouds move overhead. I drove through a cloudburst and got a much-needed car wash. Flashing signs warned of the road closure and the California Highway Patrol advised all westbound traffic to divert north on Highway 14, then west across

the mountains on Highway 178 via Lake Isabella and the Kern River Canyon to Bakersfield. I passed a miles-long backup of eastbound traffic and thanked my lucky stars that I was headed in the opposite direction. Finally, three hours late, I pulled into my hotel and tried to forget about the whole miserable experience. If El Nino comes and dumps a lot of rain on our dried-out state, these scenes will be repeated over and over. Get ready for winter!

GETTING AHEAD OF GARBAGE

Good story in The Wall Street Journal (October 20) about Germany's high recycling rate (65 percent compared to America's measly 35 percent). German power plants burn trash to make electricity, and because of Germans' aggressive recycling habits, their power plants have to ship and truck in solid waste from other countries (England, Ireland, Italy, Switzerland, et al.) to keep the incinerators burning at full capacity. Don't you wish this were a problem we could have? Coming off two long train rides and car trips this past month, I have seen so much trash alongside the railroad tracks and highways that I almost feel embarrassed to be a member of the same species that litters the land, and seems to do nothing to clean it up. For such a beautiful countryside with natural wonders to be fouled with plastic and other debris seems like a crime against nature. We should

be collecting it and burning it to make clean energy, as they do in Germany.

SWAMI SEZ

“Why is it easier to buy a gun than to get a driver’s license? Maybe the government should require gun shops to demand proof of sanity from would-be gun buyers.” (Scott McKellar)

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