

Residents remember great flood of 64

By
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IVN Contributing Writer

A huge winter storm struck the Illinois Valley 50 years ago this week, knocking out power and bridges and washing out roads all over the Valley. On Dec. 23, following five days of steady rain that melted over 20 inches of snow, (Yes, Virginia, we used to get lots of snow here!) houses were swept off their foundations and logs from Cabax Mill in Kerby floated across Highway 199. Sauer's Flat had at least 15 feet of water over the highway and West Side Road was closed at both ends.

In Kerby, Don Clark's neighbor's home floated off its foundation and ended up across the highway. Clark's own home was filled with water and mud nearly to the ceiling and took weeks to clean up.

Clark lives in that same house today. "The house was built with redwood and it dried out just fine. We didn't have to replace any wood," he said proudly. "You used to be able to see the water line in our barn, and it leans a little now, but it's still good too."

At the Oregon Caves National Monument, trees, boulders, mud and water poured through the archway of the Chalet, ripping out concrete and supporting beams. Chateau manager Harry Christiansen and assistant manager Bob Hines quickly evacuated personnel and then smashed out the French door entry on one side of the structure and the dining room's picture windows on the other side in order to allow the mud and debris to crash on down the ravine.

The lower levels of the Chateau were severely gutted by the incident and four feet of mud remained in the dining room and lounge (today's Gift Gallery). Hines, along with his wife and chef, Gene Bisceglia, camped out in the lobby for weeks as they slowly cleaned up the mess. Without available electricity, they used the cave as a meat cooler and ate canned goods retrieved out of the muck for meals.

The record pre-Christmas storm, aided by high temperatures that melted snowpack, isolated the Valley from the outside world as well as isolating the communities within it. Many along Rockydale Road had to be rescued from their own homes by "Mic" McLean using his jet boat.

The south end of the Rough and Ready Creek bridge on Highway 199 lost approximately 20 feet to the raging waters.

In Northern California, the Smith River washed out much of Highway 199, including four bridges between O'Brien and Patrick's Creek and crews had to be flown in by helicopter to survey the damage. The storm affected communities as far south as Eureka, and Garberville; as well as

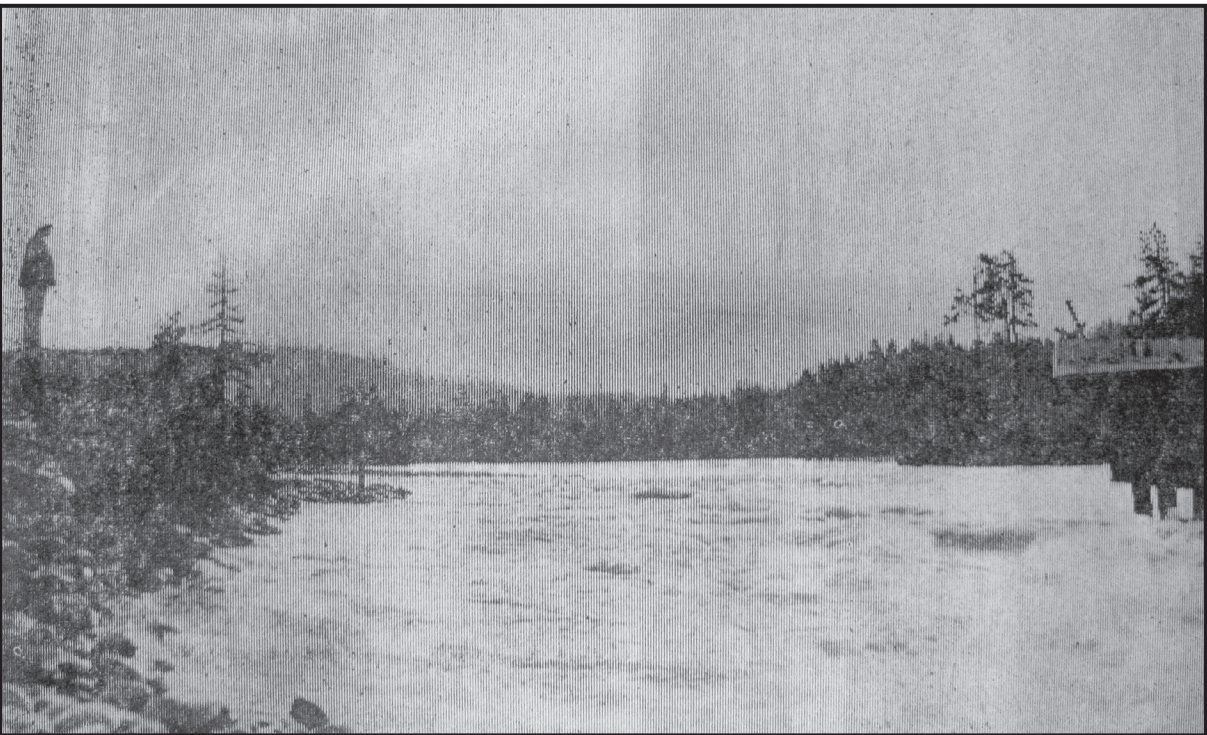


At Takilma Road and Hogue Hill the park crew builds up a ditch to widen the remaining lane of a two lane road.

Grants Pass and Medford.

Amazingly, the *Illinois Valley News* was published the very next day following the devastation, printing a full five-page paper in green ink in recognition of the Christmas holiday. The following week, the December 31 issue acknowledged those who worked night and day to begin restoring functionality, including road and park crews, Pacific Power's linemen and supervisor Larry Musil, the local telephone company that quickly restored service and volunteers from local clubs who spent hours cleaning up strangers' homes, as well as members of the volunteer fire department that gave up their own Christmas to hose out homes filled with mud.

Editor's Note: Read Al Hobart's 50-year-old column in the *Illinois Valley News* over the next few weeks to read his first-hand account of these events.



"A state road man guards the empty approach to Rough and Ready bridge." Three D-8 cats were able to fill in the approach by New Year's Day.

Library ... Continued from A-1

"It's crucial that we raise \$150,000 by the end of the year so that JCLI can continue its commitment to providing library services," said Development Coordinator Rebecca Stoltz. "These funds will be used to keep the library doors open for the people of Josephine County."

Those interested in donating can also send a check or money order payable to "Josephine Community Libraries" to P.O. Box 1684, Grants Pass, OR 97528 or make a secure donation on the Web site, www.josephinelibrary.org.

The JCLI Fall Fundraising Drive, which ends Dec. 31, is sponsored by Edward Jones, Hellgate Community Foundation, and Southern Oregon Sanitation. Those who sign up before January for a new automatic monthly donation of \$10 or more, or add at least \$10 to their current commitment, are eligible to receive a JCLI canvas tote bag.

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