

Pacifica's weather

Soon it will be: foggy, sunny and warm, overcast, rainy, drizzly, windy, pleasant. Pacifica's weather changes from block to block and hour to hour. You can enjoy our built-in airconditioning, our brisk mornings, our balmy afternoons, the fog that creeps in on little cat feet and the sight of flags billowing in the offshore winds. Pacifica is cool in the summer, comfortable in the winter, delightful in Spring and enjoyable in the Fall.

In summer, the great central valley of California heats up, sometimes to 120 degrees or more in the shade. In places without shade, the weather is almost unbearable. Air conditioning units run all day. The air is like a hot air balloon, rising as it heats.

As it rises, it makes room for cooler air, and thus layers of cool marine air rush in to take the place of the hot air that has been displaced to higher altitudes. The cool ocean air is sucked through Pacifica on its way to Modesto and Sacramento. As it travels, it turns the wind turbines in the area of the Altamont Pass. As the cool wind travels east, fogs form especially on the immediate coast and on the Skyline area. The higher locations, such as Westlake, Fairmont and upper Sharp Park Road are drenched in fog. Linda Mar residents often observe blue sky above and fog in the hills.

The hotter it is in the Valley, the more it is likely to be overcast at Skyline College and Pacific Heights School, and often at Oceana as well.

As the great valley cools down in September and October, Pacifica's weather often improves, though there are no guarantees.

Coastal weather affects different folks in different ways. Some find fog depressing and debilitating. Others find it exhilarating. Often those happiest with coastal overcast are those who have spent some significant part of their lives in Valley heat. I am one of those, for three years as a boy.

Jack London, who spent the last part of his life in Sonoma County's combination of heat and periodic fogs, remembered where he spent his seventh year, 1883, as "the bleak, sad coast." As best as I can figure out, London lived within a half mile or so of where the Seavue theater is now located, probably somewhere in the vicinity of Edgemar or Pacific Manor. It was a time when the single teacher of San Pedro school, then probably located somewhere in what is now Fairmont, was often drunk. When he was soused, the older boys would beat him up. He in turn would beat up the younger boys. The quality of education must have been as bleak as the weather.

As the wind blows east over the waves and across our beaches, large amounts of salty spray called Spindrift is ripped from the waves and deposited along the coastline and some distance inland. It corrodes metal, kills or stunts delicate plants and trees, and is responsible for much of the weatherbeaten effect of so many coastal structures. Blame it on the heat of the valley.

In winter Pacifica is often the warmest city in the Bay Area. Our weather is remarkably even winter and summer.