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THE MISSION'S BIGGEST DAY



PHOTO/KERRY BELSER

HUNDREDS FLOCKED to the Mission Wednesday to witness history, as Pope Francis, visiting Washington, D.C. during his first trip to the United States, canonized Junipero Serra, the founder of almost half of the missions in California. While the crowd watched the ceremony via a live feed to a Jumbotron set up in the courtyard, and news crews from all over the world looked on, a group of American Indians held their own quiet ceremony nearby, remembering their ancestors and the pain and death they experienced during the construction of the Mission in the 1770s. Serra's new sainthood is expected to substantially increase the number of visitors to the Mission, where he is buried. Meanwhile, the statue of Junipero Serra that keeps watch over the north entrance to Carmel was vandalized Wednesday morning with eggs and black paint. See page 11A

Tassajara fire: Started by a suicide

By MARY SCHLEY

AUTHORITIES AREN'T releasing the name — or even the gender — of the person whose suicide led to the nearly 1,100-acre wildfire that destroyed a dozen homes and damaged a 13th before it was brought under control late this week, but investigators confirmed the victim intentionally burned to death.

The blaze began around 3 p.m. Sept. 19 in the area of Carmel Valley and Tassajara roads, and was quickly whipped into a firestorm by hot, dry winds and parched vegetation.

When she went to begin her work piecing together how and where the fire started, Cal Fire investigator Catey Trenner discovered the person's burned body in a grass clearing.

"I found the individual in a clearing area, next to a vehicle. The vehicle was not burned," Trenner said. The body was in an area where the grass had been trimmed, but the fire quickly spread to longer grass, then into trees and shrubs, across the creek bed and up the steep hillside, raging out of control. "We had extreme weather conditions, and it got

going."

The fact someone committed suicide by catching himself on fire is "kind of hard to comprehend," she said, adding that nothing suggests the person meant to ignite a wildfire in the process. "There's no evidence pointing to that at all."

Trenner said the Monterey County Sheriff's homicide detectives who were also sent to the scene Saturday determined the victim died of suicide, not murder.

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Rescuing pets no small feat

By CHRIS COUNTS

RETURNING HOME from the SPCA with a new dog last Saturday afternoon to join their numerous other pets, Cachagua resident Stacey Jacobs and her family suddenly noticed something ominous on the horizon. Collectively, their hearts sank.

"We had just made it past mid-valley when I saw what can only be described as a mushroom cloud," Jacobs told The Pine Cone. "I said, 'My God, that's in Cachagua.'"

Jacobs and her husband, Matt — who were traveling with their three children — realized immediately that the smoke they saw rising in the east was coming from a wildfire. While the new SPCA dog, a great Pyrenees, was

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PHOTOS/ORVILLE MYERS (ABOVE), FACEBOOK (TOP)

Ominous smoke rose into the air in a mushroom cloud (top) Saturday afternoon after a fire started in Tassajara. The flames spread quickly through dry vegetation in the hot, windy weather, reaching great heights and driving people, pets and livestock from their homes.

Paddleboarders visit iconic, but off-limits, Big Sur beach

By CHRIS COUNTS

SCOTT EASTWOOD and five friends defied the odds in mid-August when they used stand-up paddleboards to access the elusive but much-photographed beach at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park. Photos from the trek — including one memorable image of a paddleboarder taking a dunk under the park's famous waterfall — went viral after they were posted online.

But the images have also captured the attention of a local state parks official, who said the beach Eastwood and his friends visited is closed, and they should not have been there.

According to Mat Fuzie, supervisor for state parks in the Monterey district, except for military bases, every beach in the state is open to the public — even if you have to reach it by boat — but that rule only applies to the portion of a

beach below the mean high tide line.

Above that, access can be restricted by the owner of the beach, or by state or local law. At Julie Pfeiffer Burns, Fuzie said, "the beach above the high tide line is closed by a local ordinance."

Fuzie called the beach and its dramatic surroundings "one of the popular viewsheds in the world." But trying to reach the beach by land is dangerous, as a young woman discovered last month. Despite prominent warning signs, Medina Faraz, 20, fell to her death Aug. 28 while trying to climb down the cliffs above the beach. Others have made the same mistake and paid the same price, and that's why the beach is off-limits.

Meanwhile, rough surf conditions usually make paddleboarding along the Big Sur coast too dangerous to even

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A recent paddleboarding trip revealed many rare perspectives of the Big Sur coast, including this striking view of the waterfall and beach at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park — normally only visible from a trail above.