

“Jet Copter over the scene as the orange tow trucks pull that thing out of the right lane...now you have a backup at the west-bound San Mateo Bridge toll plaza that is a little more than a quarter mile once you get past the toll plaza...once you’re a mile past the toll plaza you’re going to zoom right over to San Mateo. I’m Mika Lynn, KGO JetCopter 810.”

“OK, thank you Alicia. We’re going to go over to Dave Callahan here. He’s going to be talking on our Diablo repeater, and Dave has been checking out Contra Costa County, Highway 4 and 680.”

“Yeah, Highway 4 backs up from just before Summersville out past Railroad...242 in Concord, you’re backed up one mile on the 680...Eeewww, it’s backed up from Willow Pass.”

way to Redwood City.”

“All right, the 101 at least into San Mateo coming away from the San Francisco Airport looks pretty good right now, no new accidents reported. I’m Lynn Durling with KGO traffic on the 8s....”

As I listen to the radio on my way to school in the morning, I can’t help but be grateful that I’m not stuck in the pileup on the west-bound San Mateo toll plaza or the slowdown on eastbound 680. Six lanes of hybrid SUVs and big rigs idling with frustrated drivers behind the wheel just isn’t my idea of a pleasant morning. Traffic is a fact of life in urban America, something people just put up with, like taking off your shoes before you get on a plane. Something someone should figure out how to fix.

Out here, the roads are mostly empty.

when I follow a handful of pickups and minivans to a school program, and I pretty much know who’s in every vehicle. Once, on the way to a local gathering, we were stopped by our friendly neighborhood highway patrolman, who noticed the package in the back seat as he warned me about speeding: “Where are you off to in such a hurry?” he asked me.

“Baby shower in Denio.”

“Ah,” he responded. “I wondered about all the traffic.”

There were five vehicles ahead of us as far as we could see, and we could see 15 miles.

Imagine being the local traffic reporter in this world. It might go something like this:

“Here’s your local traffic report at 10 minutes past the hour from Jet Copter 810:

“There’s a hay truck stalled with a smoking engine in the eastbound lane on Highway 140

Highway 140 Traffic Report

Words by Carolyn Dufurrena. Photos by Linda Dufurrena.



“All right, thank you Dave. Heavy traffic is starting to build up now behind the Bay Bridge Toll Plaza although it shouldn’t be more than a 10-minute wait immediately behind the cash box... Highway 24 backed up toward Children’s Hospital for that west-bound drive.”

“Taking a look at the Peninsula right now we have KGO’s Mike Zanta.”

“Well, we have that big-rig crash on the ramp of eastbound 680, to southbound 101, it’s still there, causing a minor delay. No further problems on down the peninsula all the

There’s a lot more scenery than clutter on the horizon—and I can actually see the horizon most of the time. A pilot friend of mine described driving through the desert this way: “In Nevada, you figure out how many miles you have to go, look at the time you have to get there, and adjust your speed accordingly.” Traffic, the way you think of it, is not an issue—usually.

In my corner of the world, traffic is six sets of headlights in the 40-mile stretch that takes me across the Sod House Flat as I make the turn from Highway 95 onto 140. Traffic is

at mile marker 34, causing a slowdown as gawkers stop to see what’s going on. Traffic’s backed up three pickup lengths as travelers rummage in their coolers for water bottles to help put out the blaze. Looks like they’ve got it under control, and here comes a tractor to haul the hay truck into the rest-area turnaround.

“On the Denio repeater, traffic has come to a standstill as both lanes are totally clogged with black baldy heifers at the Harness Place hill. The Quinn River buckaroos appear to be trying to cross the highway southbound with the herd, and those girls just don’t seem to want to move.



Evening light on Pine Forest switchback towards Blue Lake and Onion Reservoir in the Pine Forest Range.



*Road to blue Disaster Peak and the Trout Creek Mountains from the top of Maggie Creek in north-central Nevada. Quinn River Ranch cows run in this country.
OPPOSITE PAGE: On Sheldon Antelope Refuge, Highway 140 near Thousand Creek Gorge in Humboldt County, Nevada, not far from the Oregon line.*

It looks like some of the cattle are attempting to turn around and head northbound, making for a complete snarl-up. In addition, air quality appears to be deteriorating, as there's a lot of hat waving and the atmosphere is filling with clouds of blue smoke above the cowboys at the back of the bunch. Looks like about a 10-minute wait while they clear that mess up, but it could be longer.

"Down by Coyote Point, heavy traffic is moving at a snail's pace as a herd of several hundred head of sheep appears to be stalled, consuming the ditch banks. It does look like they're starting to move, but not much progress is being made in any direction. Off 140 onto the Quinn River Road, a flock of rooster pheasants is apparently broken down in the middle of the lane, backing up several cottontails and a flock of quail. Again, gawkers are a problem, as everyone in the neighborhood seems to be gathering to count the roosters and see which ones are the best targets.

"Up at the turnoff, two pickup trucks are



stopped, facing different directions, completely blocking both lanes. The drivers are apparently engaged in some kind of negotiation, as there is much arm waving and pointing out the windows. Could be giving directions to tonight's poker game at the neighbor's.

"Further south along the valley, watch for occasional antelope leaping into your path from either direction. Keep an eye out for flocks of ducks sleeping in the roadway as the cold mornings attract them to the pavement, and golden eagles parked on the shoulders cleaning up last night's roadkill. Motorists should be able to spot this last hazard by the flocks of crows surround-

ing them. And, finally, there's a bull stuck in the cattle guard over the Nine Mile summit. Travelers are advised to take the Flat Road into Kings River Valley until further notice. From Jet Copter 810, that's your Highway 140 traffic report for this afternoon.

"Happy traveling!"

Traffic in the city is all about flow, and obstacles to it. In this part of the world, that's also true, but the tempo is very different. Driving anywhere out here is almost like a meditation; the long stretches of emptiness invite dreaming. Winding gravel roads draw

the imagination. These roads look like they go somewhere interesting, somewhere you want to go. Even though I drive to work on these roads every day, I never know what to anticipate. I can't ever see around the next bend or over the ridge in front of me. And I know, somewhere along the way, there's bound to be traffic. ■

Carolyn Dufurrena is a geologist, writer and rural school principal. She is married to a Quinn River buckaroo. Linda is her mother-in-law. Linda and Buster Dufurrena run Dufurrena Sheep and Cattle Company, with headquarters in this same neighborhood.



Emigrant road through Humboldt County. This is close to Imlay, Nevada—30 miles, and at least three days by oxen-pulled wagons from the start of the Black Rock Desert.



Open-range cattle move from one area to another, depending on whimsy, water and feed. This is Highway 140 between Quinn River Ranch and Denio, Nevada.



School bus stops at remote ranches in northern Humboldt County. These kids travel 30 to 45 miles to and from school. It doesn't take much longer than getting urban kids to school but the views are better and the air cleaner.