

Historic winter still grips Calif. high country

By Peter Fimrite, San Francisco Chronicle

Winter is horning in on summer in the California mountains, where a stubborn blanket of snow is preventing several high-country camps from opening just as swarms of seasonal sojourners are itching to head for the hills.

Summer officially begins Wednesday, but the historic storms that rolled through this winter deposited so much snow in the Sierra, Cascade and Siskiyou ranges that roads are still being plowed, tent sites are still being dug out and damage is still being assessed.

The lingering ice has been a particular problem in Yosemite National Park, where officials last week announced the shutdown of the famed High Sierra camps – only the third time in a century that the scenic back-country sites have been declared off-limits for the entire summer because of thick snow.

In many places, camp operators are hustling to dig out and restore access. At the city of Berkeley's Echo Lake Camp, in South Lake Tahoe, winter and spring storms damaged 37 of the 45 cabins while burying the site in 15 feet of snow. Workers could not get in to fix anything until early June, when the road leading to the camp was finally cleared.

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