

North battered by wild, wet weather



WHERE'S THE WALKWAY? A woman in what was a walkway along Hatea River, at Whangarei's Town Basin, after heavy rain yesterday.

PICTURE / SUPPLIED

Warning as sewage spills in harbour

by Mike Dinsdale and Lindy Laird

A month ago Northland was in the grips of a drought, now the region is lucky to have escaped major flood damage after two months' worth of rain fell on parts of the region in just 30 hours.

A storm passing over the country on Saturday and yesterday dumped huge amounts of rain across much of the North Island. It was accompanied by high winds.

But despite Northland getting the brunt of the storm the region escaped relatively unscathed, with no major damage reported by late yesterday. There were slips on the Brynderwys on State Highway 1 and flooding near Paihia on SH11.

Emergency services were on standby late last night in case the rain caused any problems when it coincided with high tides around the region.

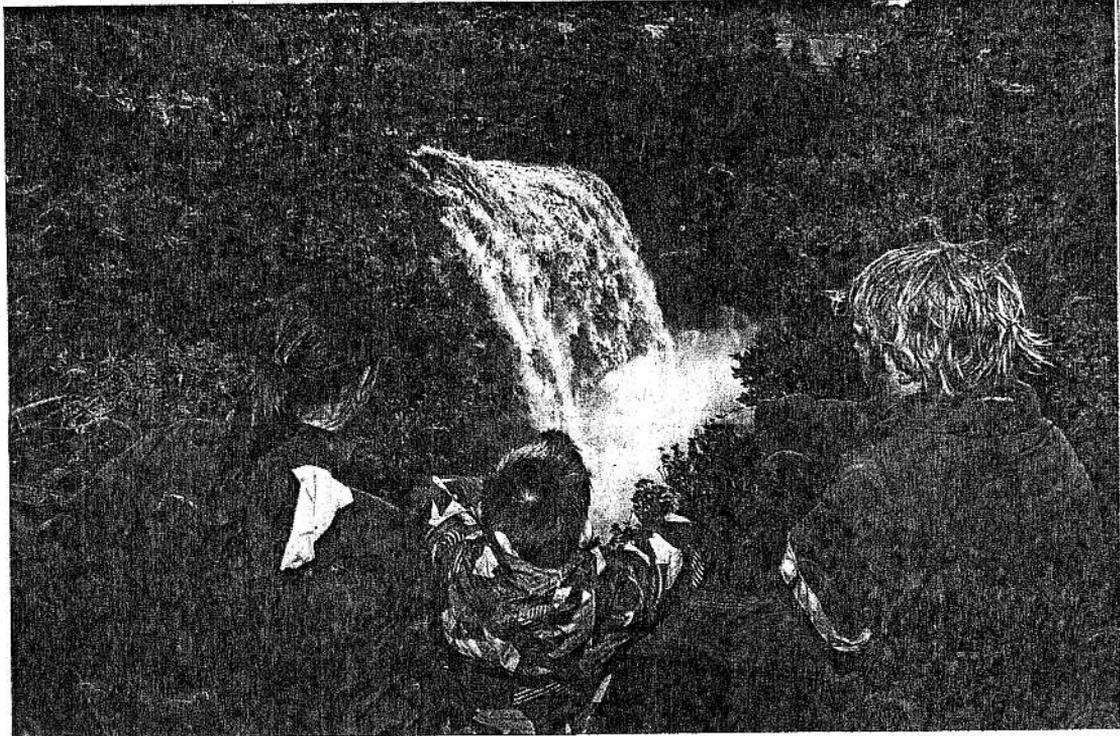
But the wild weather did force several vessels from their moorings yesterday, flooded roads and led to a sewage spill, sparking health warnings about using Whangarei Harbour.

Oakura, about 50km north of Whangarei, got the heaviest rainfall, with 237mm falling in 30 hours to 6am yesterday. The average January rainfall for Oakura is 106mm. The deluge led to the restrictions on the road to Helena Bay for a short time.

Over the same period 197mm fell at Glenbervie; 192mm at Puhupuhi; 184mm west of Kerikeri; 181mm at Kawakawa; 178mm at Kaco; 167mm at Whangarei; 158mm at Opuia; 147mm at Whangarei Heads; 122mm at Kaitake; and 72mm at Kaitiaki.

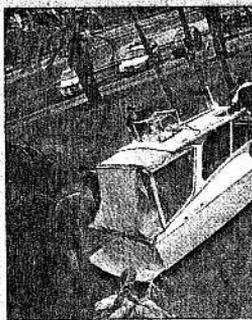
Far North Fire Service spokesman Colin Kitchen said a house in Walker Rd, Awanui, got flooded with about 15mm of water after the Awanui River lapped over a stop bank about lunchtime yesterday. Two neighbouring houses came close to being flooded while the water cut power to the area for a short time.

Health warnings have been issued following a sewage spill into Whangarei Harbour. Equipment failure caused a leak which carried stormwater mixed with



TORRENT: Shelly and Mani Nesbit, along with Mike Crowley, checked out a flood-engorged Whangarei Falls yesterday morning, after heavy rain deluged the region over the weekend.

PICTURE / RON BURGIN



LOOSE: Rescuers work to secure a launch that slipped its mooring on the Hatea River, during yesterday's storm.

PICTURE / RON BURGIN

Rescuers save launch after it rams bridge

The small launch Barrada came a cropper after breaking its mooring upstream of Victoria Bridge on the Hatea River in Whangarei, during yesterday's storm.

The Barrada was in danger of smashing into Victoria Bridge as it careened out of control down the engorged river.

The launch was swept about 200 metres downstream and rammed into the bridge soon after 11am yesterday, about 30

minutes before high tide, but rescuers prevented it from being smashed apart.

A group of people, including the boat's owner, were able to shove the bow around and nudge it onto the rain-swollen bank.

The Barrada was kept in place by people holding ropes from the bank and the bridge above until a runabout was brought in to drag it free and tow it back upstream.

highly diluted raw sewage into the harbour from the Okara pump station around 3am yesterday.

At edition time, Whangarei District Council had not provided figures about the size of the spill.

Northland's Medical Officer of

Health, Jonathan Jarman, said there was a moderate health risk to people using the harbour as a result of the spill.

Dr Jarman has issued warnings that people not swim in the harbour between Snake Bank and

the city for four days from yesterday. Other harbour users are advised to wash themselves off and carry out hand hygiene after being on or in the water during that period. People are also advised not to collect shellfish

from the area between Snake Bank and the city for 28 days.

Whangarei District Council spokeswoman Ann Midson described the breakdown of an electrical equipment part at the pump station as "frustrating and just bloody bad luck". The station and new pipeline had otherwise been able to cope with the high volume of stormwater.

Given the amount of run-off due to the rain similar health warnings would apply to swimming and shellfish collection in many parts of the district, Ms Midson said.

Generally, the deluge had not caused many problems around the district.

"It's just been a jolly good wet weekend," Ms Midson said. "We have got off extremely lucky, given the worst case scenarios that could have eventuated from the such severe weather warnings."

Even considering very high 3m tides, the water which had pooled across roads and bridges in low-lying areas eased away rapidly as the tide dropped, and drains and stormwater networks cleared.