

The timelines for Boscastle flood

Monday 16 August 2004

Note that during the timelines it was assumed wrongly at times that floodwater was receding.

For emergency workers this could have been a near miss.

12.15 Rain gauge at nearby Lesnewth some 4km (2½ miles) up the valley, shows no rainfall and it is dry in Boscastle's harbour area, yet there are torrential showers at Camelford and at the top of Boscastle.

12.30 Rain gauge at Lesnewth records just over 3mm of rain.

12.39 A Floodwatch is issued.

12.45 Rain gauge at Lesnewth records just over 12mm of rain fallen within the last 15 minutes.

13.15 Rain gauge at Lesnewth records 15mm of rain in 15 minutes.

14.15 Rain still persists, but seems to have eased. Rain gauge at Lesnewth records 7mm of rain in 15 minutes.

15.00 First of several power cuts caused by lightning. Start of persistent, heavy rain. Rain gauge at Lesnewth records 13mm of rain in 15 minutes.

15.15 Rain gauge at Lesnewth records nearly 16mm of rain in 15 minutes.

15.30 The River Valency begins to breach its banks.

15.35 Call to Cornwall County Fire Brigade, reports of people trapped by flood water in the Valency Valley, Boscastle. Launceston Station's Firefighters are mobilised.

15.45 Rain gauge at Lesnewth records almost 25mm of rain in 15 minutes.

15.46 Call from Boscastle's Cliff Rescue Team to Falmouth coastguard concerning rising water levels. Reports suggest that the river has risen over 2m (6 - 7ft) within the last hour.

15.50 Call from the Visitor Centre to the Fire Brigade, reporting flooding in the car park.

15.53 - 16.49 Fire services from Launceston, St Austell, Bodmin, Padstow and Truro are mobilised to Boscastle.

16.00 A 3m (10ft) wall of floodwater rides through Boscastle car park at an estimated speed of 40mph. Bins float. Rebecca David has ushered 5 adults and 6 children up a step ladder into the attic of the Visitor Centre. Rain gauge at Lesnewth shows that the rain is now easing with 10mm of rain in 15 minutes.

16.02 Coastguard are informed “situation bad”. Roads are flooded.

16.03 RAF Kinloss, the rescue co-ordination centre, is put on standby.

16.06 Firefighters from Delabole Station, after attending a car accident, are mobilised to Boscastle.

16.15 Firefighters from Delabole Station, the first emergency service, are in attendance at Boscastle.

******* Water levels seem to be dropping. *******

16.17 Port Isaac Inshore Lifeboat launched.

16.20 A footbridge is washed away.

16.22 Rescue helicopters 169 from RAF Chivenor and 193 from RNAS Cudrose are scrambled.

16.30 All access roads to Boscastle are closed by the Police. A further wall of floodwater rides through Boscastle car park and crashes into the Visitor Centre. Water now entering the Visitor Centre, the double doors are breaking.

16.35 Bude Inshore Lifeboat launched.

16.36 Cornwall’s air ambulance requested to standby for casualties.

16.45 Rain gauge at Lesnewth records no rain in 15 minutes, yet it is pouring in Boscastle.

16.52 Severe flooding is reported by the Police helicopter.

17:00 The Boscastle floods are approaching peak level. Cars are being washed out of the car park.

There is an almighty crash and the whole of the Visitor Centre building is shaken. The end wall collapses along with the roof. The waters, some 2½ m (8ft) deep, are now lapping the top step of the attic ladder. 9 climb out of the velux window onto the remaining roof of the Centre, whilst 3 wait inside. The rain is so heavy that it is hard to see a few feet away.

17.10 “Pass to all emergency services. This is a major incident, repeat major incident. We request all the standby aircraft available and all available land-based emergency crews as we are in danger of losing Boscastle and all the people in it.”. Cptn. Pete McLelland’s message to RAF Kinloss from RNAS Culdrose Rescue helicopter 193.

17.18 Helicopters 170 from Chivenor, 180 from RAF St Mawgan and 194 from Culdrose are scrambled.

17.23 Helicopters begin winching people from buildings.

17.55 Truro and Plymouth Hospitals are put on standby by the emergency services’ operation “Gold Control”.

18.00 Rescue helicopter 193 reports 15 people dropped off so far, 12 of whom have been rescued from the Visitor Centre’s roof and flown to safety on Boscastle football pitch, which is the drop zone for the helicopters. This is one of the largest numbers of people rescued in a single flight during the whole operation.

18.00 Portland’s Coastguard helicopter is scrambled.

21.00 First Fire Brigade relief crews mobilised to Boscastle from St.Ives, St.Austell, Newquay, Camborne and Penzance. Helicopters begin to return to bases. Over 150 people have been airlifted or assisted to safety by the emergency services. Cliff rescue and inshore lifeboat teams continue to search for casualties, checking cars washed out to sea. 2 dogs trapped in cars and lost, are reported.

Over 50 local people and visitors spend the night at an emergency rest centre managed by the WRVS at Camelford Leisure Centre.

Tuesday 17th August 2004

09.00 24 hour rainfall totals - Lesnewth, 184.9mm (181mm between 11.30 - 16.30). Otterham, 200.4mm. Boscastle 88mm in 60 minutes and 112mm in 90 minutes.

09.00 16 people are possibly unaccounted for.

The search and rescue operation involving North Cornwall District Council, Cornwall County Fire Brigade, specialist search teams with dogs from Wales Fire Service, Devon Urban Search and Rescue, Marine and Coastguard Agency, Ministry of Defence helicopters, RNLI, Devon and

Cornwall police, Yorkshire police, Environment Agency and others, continue to search buildings and vehicles.

**13.00 One person unaccounted for.
This is later resolved.**

Wednesday 18th August

Occupants are escorted back into their homes to gather vital belongings.

Thursday 19th August

Overall co-ordination and control is handed over to North Cornwall District Council. Restoration and recovery begins.

Not sure if this was a NEAR MISS?

7 helicopters airlifted 100 people (including 6 firefighters) to safety.

Crew safety and protecting resources will be critical in any similar flood events in the UK

The only way will be to have a predetermined plan for changing conditions.

A full awareness of rainfall amounts leading to the flood and during the rescue or deployment of resources phase.

A two stage phase to flood events

Stage 1

Crews deployed to rescue persons and to provide assistance with salvage work using minimum equipment and ensuring appliances and crews are positioned for quick safe egress to safe area. Life risk priority.

Pumping out of property is unlikely during this stage.

Resources are protected for deployment in full as the event eases.

Weather conditions monitored and crews updated of likely conditions in catchment areas above incident.

Stage 2

This will be used when

Flooding is not effected by rivers.

Drainage systems and roadway flooding only.

River flooding is effecting area but rainfall has eased in both catchment and local area.

Monitoring of weather conditions indicates that there is no call for stage 1 to be used.

Flood warn will provide a strategic plan for flooding events, that can be used by rescue services.