Exceptional weather events

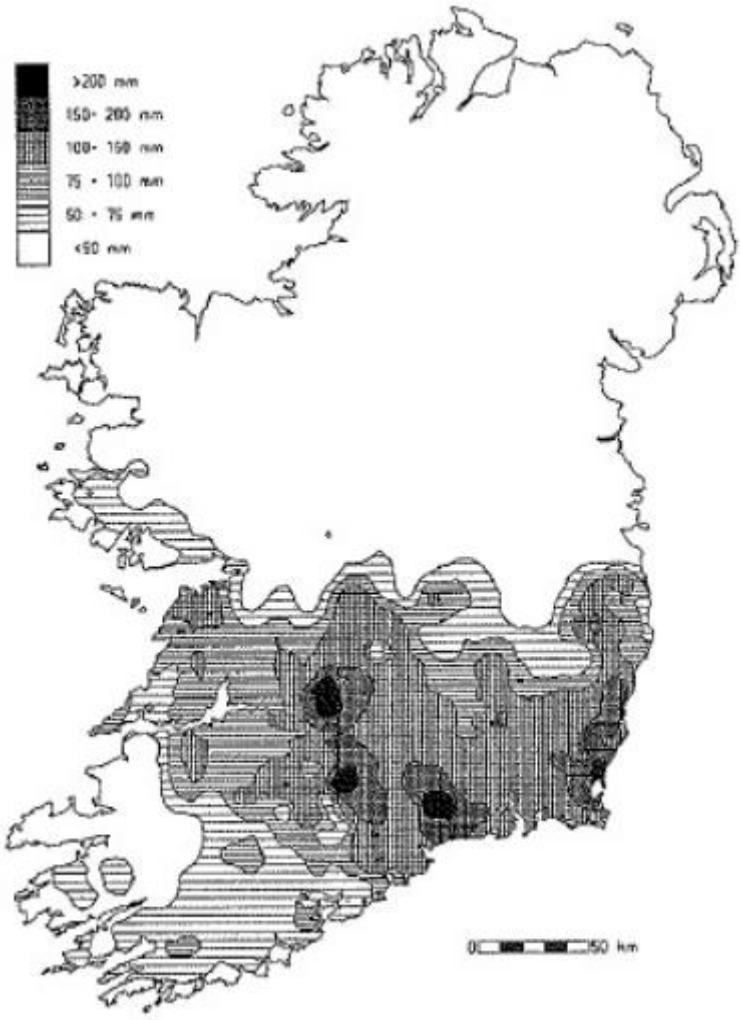
Type of event: Heavy rain/ flooding

Date: August 1997



Credit: Chris Wilson

4-day rainfall from 3rd to 6th



Flooding follows exceptional rainfall

Many parts of the south of the country suffered severe flooding during the first week of the month as rain fell persistently between the 3rd and 7th. The cause of the rainfall was a depression which initially followed an easterly track towards Biscay at the beginning of the month. Instead of tracking southwards as predicted by computer forecast models the depression turned northwards to lie just off the South Coast of Ireland by the 3rd, where it remained for several days. The rainfall along its northern edge, which lay in a band between counties Limerick and Wexford, was the heaviest ever recorded at some southern stations. Between 50 and 150mm was recorded on the 3rd in many parts of the south and southeast, while over 200mm was recorded in places between the 3rd and 7th (see map on cover and on left).

A measure of the exceptional nature of this rainfall is given by the return period i.e. how often a fall of a particular magnitude could be expected at a station. At Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford, for example, the return period for its fall on the 3rd of 109mm is 100 years, while the return period for the 4-day fall there of 190mm is closer to 500 years. Among the places worst affected by flooding were Blackwater Co. Wexford (pictured page 2) and Clonmel Co. Tipperary. Flooding of farmland seriously damaged arable crops while another effect of the exceptional rainfall was pollutants being washed into waterways as at Cahore in Wexford (above right). Parts of County Cork were again badly hit by flooding after more localized heavy rain on the 26th. Freemount in north Cork measured 58mm late on the 26th; the village was inundated when the River Allow burst its banks while further south Clonakilty suffered similarly when the River Feagle overflowed.

Thanks to Chris Wilson, the rainfall observer at Wexford Wildfowl Reserve for supplying the pictures.