

**July 2005**

## **Flooding ravages Catchpool and Orongorongo valleys**



*A picnic area is submerged during the flooding. Photo, John Rush*

It could be at least 18 months before recreational facilities in the Catchpool and Orongorongo Valleys are fully reinstated following the worst flooding in at least 30 years( *some say 800 years Ed.*) at the end of March.

A massive 454 mm of rain fell in 42 hours, destroying foot bridges, sections of tracks and roading, and part of the camping ground and associated facilities.

The deluge began on the evening of 29 March and by 2pm the next day, 108mm of rain had fallen in the area. The Catchpool River was impassable by this stage, with water covering the full width of the concrete slab of the ford.

The rain continued all the following night and by day break, water was flowing through neighbouring properties. The Coast road was blocked in many places by slips and the Catchpool road was washed away, upstream from the visitor centre. A huge slip had also come down across the road.

The heaviest rain fell just after midnight on the second evening at the rate of 38mm an hour!

The rain was concentrated in a 10km section of the coast road from Jackson's Farm in the north to approximately 3km from the coast, and a similar area in the Orongorongo Valley, leaving major destruction in its wake.

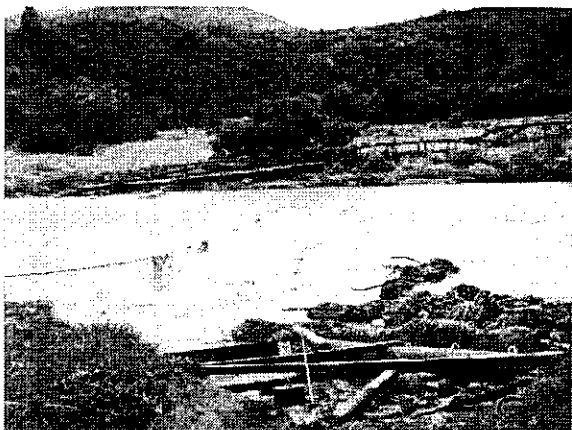


Both bridges on the Five Mile track washed away and the Orongorongo track was blocked in many places by fallen trees and slips. 8 bridges were either washed away buried or so badly damaged that they had to be removed. All bridges on the Big Bend track were washed away and a huge slip completely destroyed the northern end of the track

Facilities in the Catchpool Valley were damaged. Parts of the water supply pipeline washed away in several places, the ablution block and barbeque shelter in the camp ground were flooded, and the camp ground was closed for about a month. It has now re-opened minus half the camping area. Much of it was washed away, and access to the remaining area was destroyed.



In the Orongorongo Valley two private huts were washed away and two others were wrecked and will have to be demolished. The Tararua Tramping Hut's club was washed off its foundations and there are plans to relocate it.



"We are slowly managing to re-open facilities but it will take up to 18 months before they are all reinstated," Catchpool ranger Dave Lewis said.

He acknowledged the huge DOC staff and volunteer effort that has gone into the clean-up exercise.

Contributed by Dave Lewis, Ranger, Department of Conservation Catchpool field centre.

*Photos taken by DOC Poneke Area Manager Peter Simpson*

## Rare Visitor to the Northern entrance of the Park



On the 26th June, a few intrepid naturalists were surprised at the Wainui end of the Whakanui track, with multiple sightings of the little known Snocotofern Whakanuis. In the South Island high country its robust cousin, Snohump Dicksinkin is still common despite global warming, but this gracile version is sadly rare in the balmy clime of Wellington.

Snocotofern's life cycle is poorly understood. Nothing is known of its feeding habits, mating rituals or gestation processes. All that has been studied is the unique defense mechanism, involving the shedding of body parts. Many Lizards (Sauria) use detachable distracters ( twitching tails) to aid escape. Being non-ambulatory the Snocotofern must use an aggressive defense to discourage violation of its personal space. Employing exquisite control of gravity and time, the Snocotofern gently deposits a sacrificial limb at the boundary of the intruders cervical and thoracic vertebrae. the resulting shock ensures instant retreat and lifelong wariness. Typically the aggressor's companions become helpless with sympathetic convulsions precipitating a general melee in which the Snocotofern is forgotten and melts quietly away until favourable conditions return to call on this gorgeous creature once more to spread wonderment.