

Cumbria - Keswick Campsite, Lake District

Overview

Keswick camp and caravan site is located in the northern area of the Lake District on the shores of Derwent Water. It is bordered on three sides by Derwent Water, River Greta and River Derwent. It has the capacity for 250 pitches, 150 caravans and 100 tents. The campsite is regularly full to capacity, despite camper's knowledge of flood risk.

The campsite experienced its worst flooding on record in November 2009 and floods very regularly, usually multiple times per year. Another major flood was in January 2005. The flooding is caused by heavy rainfall and rising lake and river levels. It is not just the campsite that is affected by the flooding. The whole town of Keswick is affected.

Keswick campsite is very vulnerable and the impacts can be devastating if measures are not put in place and action taken. On a number of occasions the campsite has been completely underwater and anything left on the site is destroyed.

Derwent Water Lake also threatens the site but is slow to react therefore monitoring measures can be put in place by the campsite staff. However, if the River Greta threatens the site, this can be very rapid and immediate evacuation is required.

The Environment Agency has worked with the campsite to help the managers and their staff understand the mechanisms of flooding and provide them with rainfall, river level, lake level and forecast data so they can make an on the ground assessment and manage the site as effectively as possible. They are very aware of their local situation and ensure the campers and caravanners are also aware.

Keswick Flood Action Group has also been set up as a result of floods in 2005 which supports the wider community and the campsite in becoming more resilient as a community.

Key Objectives / Outcomes

The main objective of the work the Environment Agency did with the campsite and local area was to create a more resilient community able to help themselves when inevitable floods occur. The community is now aware of the risks they face and are prepared. They now know what to do in the event of an emergency and what they can do to help reduce the flood risk, both as individuals and as a community.

The campsite now monitor the weather forecast using a variety of sources. They monitor river levels through a gauging station on the Environment Agency website that can be accessed directly by the campsite. If there is a risk of flooding it is displayed at reception for

campers to see. All staff are trained to deal with flood events and have a flood plan which has been carried out successfully.

If there is a flood warning, campers are advised to remove awnings before dark in case of evacuation. The biggest concern is a rapid onset of flooding from the River Greta; river and lake levels are monitored on site and recorded at regular intervals in the flood book; staff are prepared to evacuate the site if required following guidance from the Environment Agency and experienced staff.

There is a flood box in reception containing information for staff, as well as hi-vis jackets and whistle/bell to raise the alarm; torches are always on charge in reception. There is a 'flood phone' which the Environment Agency contacts the site on, and this is always on ready to receive calls, and is always with a member of staff.

The reception and shower/toilet block have been raised above flood levels with flood gates on access doors and airbrick covers. There is also a high level emergency route through the adjacent campsite in case the main access is blocked.

The Environment Agency has had contact with the campsite for a number of years and contact will always be ongoing as incident management develops along with technology improvements and forecasting advances.

Key Stakeholders

Previously, engagement was via the campsite managers. However, managers have now involved all their staff so if the managers are away there is always a member of staff who has the insight and knowledge of what to do.

Through the formation of Keswick Flood Action Group following the floods in January 2005, there is now a much wider forum in which the campsite can access extra volunteers and link in with other issues which involve the town.

Challenges

The campsite face particular challenges in trying to manage the site as efficiently and effectively as possible, trying to balance having a full, thriving site with the implications of severe weather and possible evacuation. Decisions to evacuate or close the site are not taken lightly and lots of campsite staff resource is used in monitoring the weather, lake and river levels as well as keeping campers informed.

Benefits

- An emergency flood plan is now in place and staff are trained to know what to do before, during and after an event.
- The site remains fully booked and can now minimise the impacts and effects of flooding on the business and users of the site.
- A case study is being developed to be shared nationally to show other campsites how they can use weather and flood data to be more informed and better prepared.

Lessons Learned

- Monitoring is key; get to know what the levels mean for your site and record regularly.
- Don't be afraid of the fact that you flood, the campers don't mind and it is better for them to know what could happen and be prepared just in case.
- Having an agreed plan of how to efficiently evacuate the site (and plan high level routes if possible) is beneficial.

Contacts

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