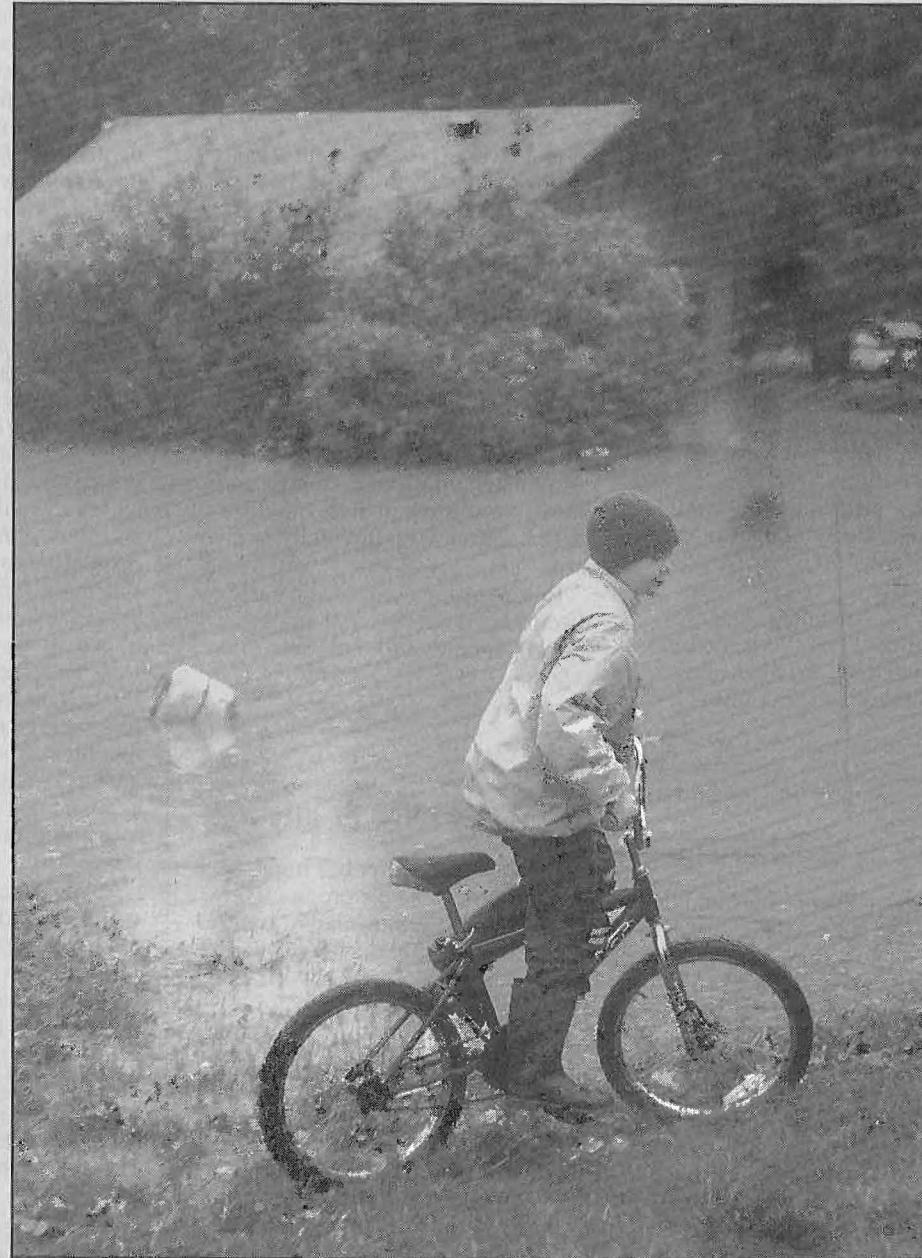


*"The water was a little high but I certainly didn't think it looked like it was going to flood."*

Sedro-Woolley resident Dana Arendse

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# Hamilton: 'The town is toast this time'



**Dylan Nersten, 8, of Hamilton takes a look** at flood along Pettit Street in Hamilton this Morning.

Matt Wallis / Skagit Valley Herald

By **BEVERLY CRICHFIELD**  
Staff Writer

The fields between Highway 20 and Cape Horn and Hamilton were covered in some places with water early today. The water had risen so high it tipped vehicles over halfway and covered several RVs left in driveways, and it crept up the sides of several barns and homes.

Along Highway 20 near Hamilton, cars slowly made their way through about 4 inches of water.

Skagit County Search and Rescue vehicles scouted flooded areas looking for people stranded by the flood. The town of Hamilton was completely under water, some areas as deep as 5 or 6 feet. Trailers, homes and vehicles were submerged in the muddy water that started crawling over the banks of the river early this morning.

Workers with the Uniman Corp. watched the water rise near their building, which they had barricaded with sandbags. One employee of the olive plant said they knew floodwaters were coming and told customers they wouldn't be shipping any products for a few days.

From the corner of the highway and Pettit Street, residents, fire crews, search and rescue teams looked down toward the river and the roadway, which was covered in water.

Melinda Nersten stood on the small knoll at Pettit and Bella streets. The Hamilton resident's house sits dry just about 15 feet from floodwaters. Having lived in Hamilton for nine years, she remembered the 1995 floods and said she thinks the flood waters she's seen today are worse.

"I told the kids last night we have nothing to worry about, we're fine unless the dike breaks. But I woke up this morning, looked out my window and saw the reflection of the lights on the water, and said, 'Now we've got something to worry about,'" she said. "The town is toast this time."

Larry Fox, who has lived in Hamilton for about 15 years, watched as about 3

feet of water crawled up the side of his house along Pettit Street.

After flood predictions yesterday, Fox began elevating his furniture in the house and removing valuables. He finally gathered his boat and truck at about 4:30 a.m. and took them to higher ground across the highway to the First Baptist Church where dozens of motor homes and RVs lined up in the parking lot and along a long gravel driveway in front of church. The church is serving as an emergency shelter for people who had to leave their homes. The shelter reported serving 50 families and about 250 people.

Meantime, three members of the U.S. Army National Guard steered their camouflaged Humvee through the deep floodwaters on Pettit Street. The servicemen had driven through the flood looking for people stranded in their homes. Pfc. Joseph Fairchild reported that he and his crew rescued seven people, mainly those who did not realize the water was rising so quickly as well as some stubborn homeowners who are used to waiting out heavy rains.

The guardsmen also struggled with the Skagit County Search and Rescue Agency to rescue one of the National Guard's eight-wheeled Hemit vehicles that had gotten stuck in the flood waters. A county search and rescue boat also became stranded near Cape Horn trying to rescue the stranded Hemit.

In Sedro-Woolley, Fruitdale Road was closed because the south end was completely covered with water.

Resident Dana Arendse rushed down to the end of Township Street where the river had swollen and flooded the road. The water had covered a nearby farmer's field and several baseball fields in the area. Arendse said she drove along Township at 8:30 p.m. last night.

"The water was a little high but I certainly didn't think it looked like it was going to flood," she said.

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