

Mount's Bay on October 27th 2004 - Storm Surge and Flooding

On the 27th October a deep depression moved north to the west of Land's End. It's central pressure dropped to 952mb. In Penzance the pressure dropped to 976mb during the early evening. This, combined with a SE gale, gave a massive swell and storm surge on top of what was already a high Spring tide. The situation became really severe as the high tide arrived around 17:30BST. This storm proved to be the event of a lifetime in Mount's Bay.

There was not a great deal of rain, and the gale was not severe. The maximum gust recorded at my site, around 1,000 metres from the sea front, was 52mph. In the last 10 years I have recorded 80 days with gusts > 50mph, 15 of these with a S or SE winds. In exposed spots maximum gusts were generally 60-70mph, again not exceptional. The sea was so huge because the storm surge and swell moved north at roughly the same speed as the developing depression, and therefore built up over 2 or 3 days before hitting Cornwall. The pressure was at its lowest exactly on high tide, again adding to it's height. The exceptional height of the tide, bad enough in itself, allowed the huge waves to get closer to the sea defences before breaking, with severe results.



The size of the sea was simply staggering, the largest I've ever seen in Mount's Bay. It is now generally considered to be as bad, if not worse, than during the Ash Wednesday 1962 storm, the last time there was significant sea damage in the Penzance Newlyn area. (The 1987 storm which was so severe at Porthleven was a south westerly).

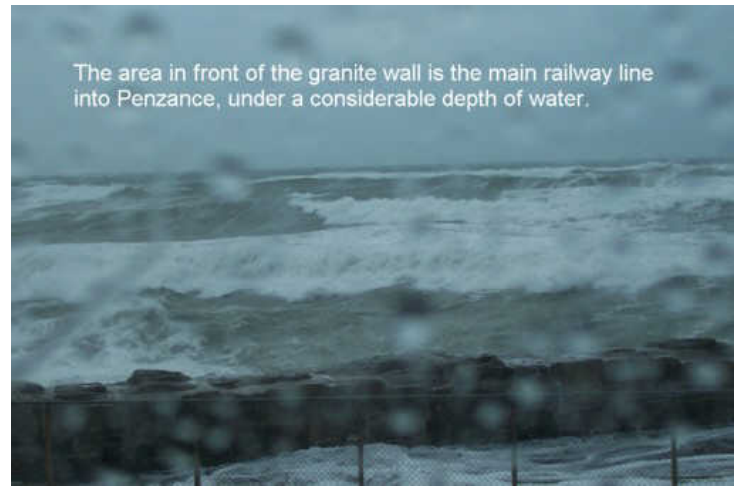
The row of attractive cottages along Penzance prom were all flooded. The Penzance harbour car park, together with many cars, was flooded > hour before high tide. Waves hitting the sea defences shot 100-200 feet into the air, going over buildings and dropping seaweed and pebbles on the roofs.



Many of the boats in Mousehole harbour were badly damaged, and the sea surged into the low lying cottages. This happened largely because the winter baulks across the harbour mouth were not yet in place. There was flood damage caused by the sea hitting the sea wall, shooting in the air, and then going down the chimneys and forcing it's way under the roof tiles.

At one time the main road into Penzance was closed to all but emergency vehicles. The main railway line into the town was under the sea, and suffered damage.

People were evacuated from the low lying areas of Newlyn as the sea poured into their homes. At the Tolcarne Inn there was serious flooding, and a crab was seen walking through the bar!



The area in front of the granite wall is the main railway line into Penzance, under a considerable depth of water.



A very wet Tolcarne Inn



The sea surged up the river at Newlyn Coombe. It is possible to see the next wave surging past the white building in the top left of the photograph.

The damage to the sea defences between Penzance and Mousehole, a 4 mile stretch of the coast heading towards Land's End, was considerable. Holes of various sizes appeared as a result of undermining, and several parts were slipping, all the way along this stretch. The main road into Mousehole was in danger of subsiding into a particularly large hole.



Undermining of the sea defences at Newlyn Green caused several holes like this.



The railings mark the road into Mousehole, which is in danger of slipping down the cliff.