

Severe floods submerge towns in northern England

By **Melissa Gray**, CNN

London, England (CNN) -- Parts of Scotland and northern England were under several feet of water Friday morning after raging rivers burst their banks and flooded towns, officials said.

A police officer was missing after flooding in Cumbria, near the border with Scotland, Cumbria police said Friday. An earlier report that 11 people were missing was incorrect, a police spokesman said.

The Cumbria town of Cockermouth was one of the worst hit. The Georgian market town sits at the junction of two rivers, the Cocker and the Derwent, which raged overnight and flooded the town center.

The waters were so strong at times that rescuers could not send their boats against the flow to reach trapped residents, witnesses said.

Two bridges in Workington, about seven miles east of Cockermouth, collapsed because of the floods, Cumbria police said.

Witnesses said the nearby town of Keswick, about 10 miles to the southeast of Cockermouth, was also badly hit.

The Fire Service and Royal Air Force evacuated about 200 people by helicopter from Cockermouth's main street and town square, both cut off by the floodwaters, Cumbria police said.

Several reception centers were set up at schools and leisure centers for residents forced from their homes, the police said.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown spoke with Cumbria's chief constable Friday morning and promised him any government help he needs, Brown's office at Downing Street said.

"His thoughts are with all those who have been impacted by the floods and our thanks go to the emergency services, who continue their extraordinary efforts to help those affected," a statement from his office said.

Environment Secretary Hilary Benn was in Cumbria on Friday to assess a government response, Downing Street said.

There were no deaths reported from the floods, which began Thursday after heavy rain swept over the region.

Bad weather was forecast to continue across the United Kingdom over the next few days, with more heavy rain and gale-force winds bringing the continued risk of flooding, the Met Office weather service said.

The heaviest of the rain is expected to continue to fall over Cumbria and western parts of Scotland, along with north Wales, the Met Office said.

Another 3 to 4 inches (75 to 100 millimeters) of rain was expected over those regions Friday, with another 6 inches (150 millimeters) over the higher areas of Cumbria, the Met Office said.

"The rain will fall on areas that are already saturated, and we are working closely with agencies, local authorities and emergency services to ensure they are prepared," Met Office Chief Forecaster Bob Wilderspinou said.

Cockermouth, the birthplace of poet William Wordsworth and mutineer Fletcher Christian, was just days away from its annual celebration to turn on the town's Christmas lights.

It is a popular tourist town near the Lake District, which is known for outstanding natural beauty.