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A friend's daughter called up the other day to say that she was going on a 3-day rock climbing trip in late March for school "PE". Part of the homework they were to do in preparation for this trip was to find out what the weather was usually like at the time of year in the region they would be visiting. Nicole was calling up to see if we had a weather station in the area and could I help her out with some data and some ideas for how to analyse it.

My first thoughts were not about weather but about how much Phys Ed had changed since I was in school (the closest we got to rock climbing was throwing 9 pound medicine balls at each other - very little connection other than the consequences of getting it wrong!). Once Nicole got me back on track I suggested a couple of ways she might want to present the rainfall data, and I thought that this might make a good Weather Sense topic for this time of year - looking in the rear view mirror to see what is coming.

During the harvest, how many days are rain affected? To look at this I used HortPlus MetWatch to calculate the daily rainfall totals from weather stations in each growing area, and dumped them to a spreadsheet for further analysis. The spreadsheet was used to count the number of days (a) with any rain at all, and (b) with more than 0.5mm of rain (ie more than a passing shower or two).

The results are shown in Figure 1 (number of days with any rain) and Figure 2 (number of days with over 0.5mm of rain). Marlborough and Nelson strut their stuff through the harvest season with the lowest number of days affected by rain. I was a bit surprised by the number of rain affected days in Hawkes Bay and Gisborne districts. No wonder their occupants tend to be a bit more nervous than their South Island counterparts at this time of the year! The other characteristic of Hawkes Bay and Gisborne is that all three months March, April and May are more uniform in being rain affected than the other districts which displayed the expected pattern of more and heavier rain days as time progresses towards winter.

With the hectic activities of harvest it is likely that you are reading this on a rainy day! Small comfort that the odds are that you will be out picking again soon.



Autumn Rain Days

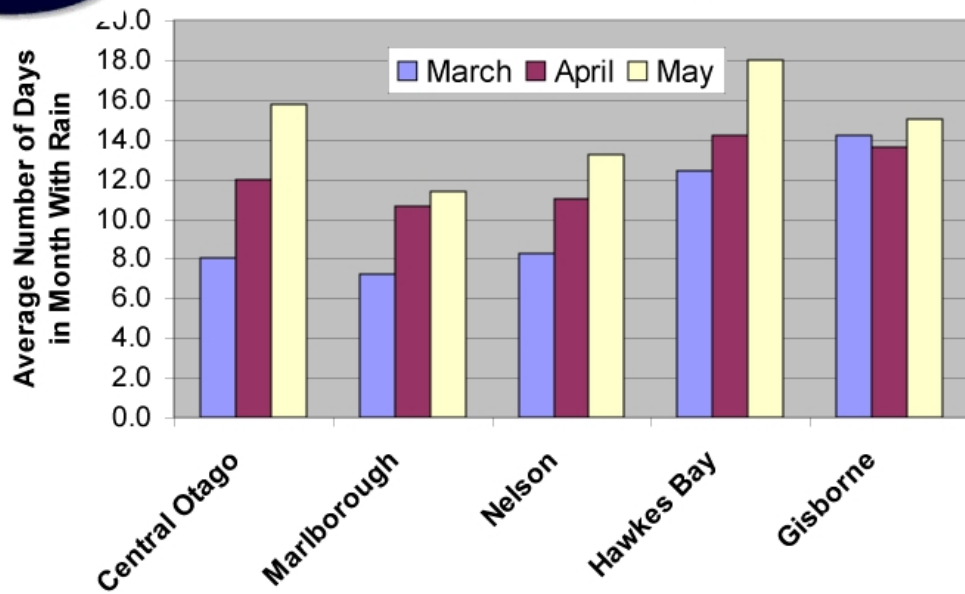


Figure 1. Number of days affected by rain in each month of the autumn.



Autumn (Heavy) Rain Days

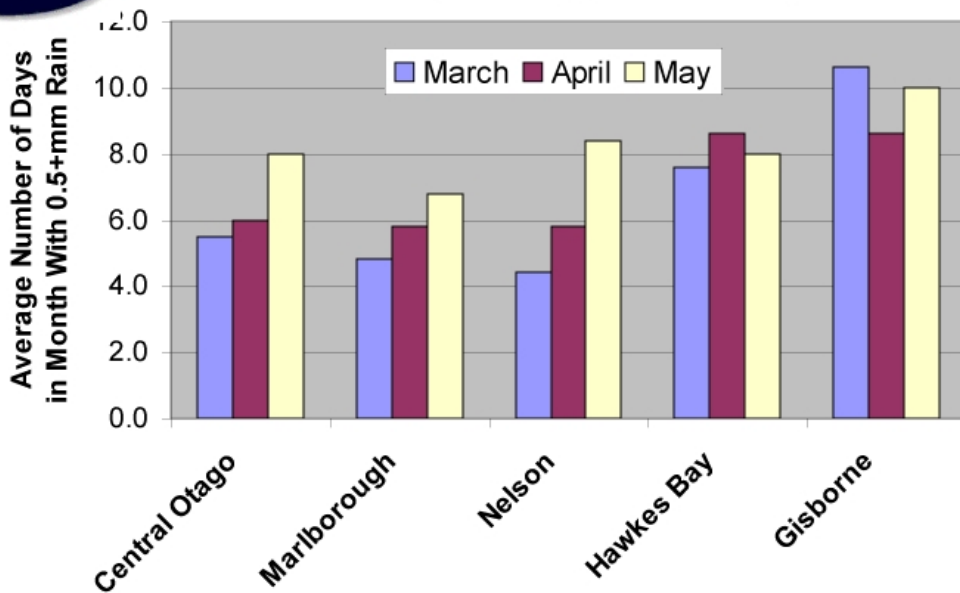


Figure 2. Number of days affected by more than 0.5mm of rain in each month of the autumn.