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## Traffic inches up Takaka Hill

Bumper-to-bumper traffic was inching up the Takaka Hill today as people swarmed to the 48-hour New Year dance party, the Gathering, at Canaan Downs.

Organiser Grant Smithies said the traffic was banked up for a couple of kilometres on the main road at 9am and he expected the congestion to last into the afternoon.

"It's reasonably hellish at the moment, but it's all coming in quite steadily."

About 2000 people were already on site at 9am and he expected the majority to arrive this afternoon. A sell-out crowd of 8000 is expected.

The steady stream of traffic has caused delays for other motorists using the road.

Takaka real estate agent Jan Allan said a friend had left Takaka for Nelson at 5pm yesterday and did not get there until 9pm, a journey which usually takes two hours.

Constable Chris Maitland of Motueka police urged people to drive carefully and accept it would take a long time to get anywhere today.

"All you can do is accept it and not stress out."

Mr Smithies said there were "absolutely no gate sales". About 20 car loads of people had waited in traffic for three hours yesterday, only to be turned away.

He said the last stop for desperate ticket seekers was the Motueka Information Centre. Centre spokeswoman Frances Newman said about 200 \$51 tickets were left this morning. However she was expecting more unsold tickets to come in from other centres today.

Early this morning at Canaan Downs the sun was intense, but Mr Smithies warned people to come prepared for cold nights. Sunny weather is forecast for today and tomorrow.

Icy cold drinks will be served during the event thanks to a massive dump of hail on Monday night.

Enterprising Takaka man and stallholder Hans Strub said yesterday he couldn't believe his luck that so much "ice" fell from the sky.

"It was a godsend for us but I think I was the only person that was pleased about it. The hail will be perfect for



Gene Kennedy of Nelson adds his touch to the ground sculpture in the ambient zone at the Gathering.

keeping the drinks cold." About an inch of hail and 36mm of rain fell on Monday afternoon in a "spectacular" electric storm on the hill. Power to the area was cut for several hours.

Mr Strub said rain washed hail off the road into neat piles, in places half a metre deep.

"I just got the snow shovel out and went to work bagging it up."

With half a cubic metre of hail stored in the freezer, he said he had enough to keep the soft drinks on ice for the three-day New Year dance party.

A team of counsellors is on hand at the site in case any festival-goers end up suffering from the effects of drugs or dehydration.

Nelson Mental Health and Safety Ray

Health and Safety Ray

counsellor,

MAIL PHOTO / MARION VAN DIJK c44941

Pierce, said there was a team of several qualified counsellors and some scouts who would be watching out for anyone who may have taken too much of drugs such as LSD or ecstasy.

"We want to get them into a quiet space, a safe environment because if they have acid or ecstasy in their systems they may need to be taken out of danger's way."

He said he hoped there wouldn't be many drugs, however he feared that many would be trying them for the first time.

However, Mr Pierce also said that the greater threat was dehydration. St John's Ambulance workers, two Rape Crisis Workers and the Westpac Helicopter team.

Fellow counsellor Cindy Svendsen said scouts would be roving the site watching out for people who looked like they needed help.

Mr Pierce said as he was not authorised to prescribe medication he would be using methods such as massage and even vitamin C to help people.

— by staff reporters



MAIL PHOTO / MARION VAN DIJK c44939 Michelle Hodgkinson of Nelson with the three guardians she created that will be in the drum and bass zone at the Gathering.