

Monthly Weather Report

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SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS COMPILED FROM RETURNS OF OFFICIAL STATIONS AND VOLUNTEER OBSERVERS

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February 1955—Mild during the first week, then unusually cold with considerable snow; sunny.

In the early part of the month the British Isles was under the influence of an Atlantic air-stream but an influx of polar air on the 9th was the prelude to a spell of severe wintry weather, the worst since 1947, which was maintained almost to the end of the month.

During the first few days pressure was low to the north-west of the British Isles, and depressions from the Atlantic moved eastwards across the southern half of the country bringing considerable rain to the south-west; parts of Devon and Cornwall had more than 2½ in. during the first week, but there were no large falls elsewhere. Weather was mild with sunny periods for a time but cold northerly winds accompanied by slight snow showers spread over Scotland and parts of northern England towards the end of the week; nevertheless, at many places on the south coast temperature on the 7th rose to 57°F. At the beginning of the second week a ridge of high pressure developed south-eastwards from an anticyclone over Greenland, and during the 8th and 9th cold air, accompanied by local thunder, spread south over the whole country; temperatures fell sharply by 5–10°F. Generally sunny weather followed, but with snow showers, which were frequent and often prolonged in the north and east. Temperature continued to fall progressively until by the end of the third week day temperatures were only a little above freezing point. The strong to gale force winds in Scotland caused serious snow-drifts, and many northern farms and villages were isolated. The winds moderated on the 18th but a weak low pressure system settled over the country, and there were heavy falls of snow particularly in Scotland, where undrifted snow was reported to be lying to a depth of 2 ft. in some northern regions. As a consequence of the light winds and snow cover very low temperatures were recorded. Northolt had –3°F. on the ground on the morning of the 20th. A temporary invasion of warmer air during the same day in the south-west gave prolonged rain and snow which was accompanied by thunderstorms in the western English Channel. Even colder weather followed over Scotland; on the morning of the 23rd the air temperature at Braemar fell to –13°F., the lowest for any month in the British Isles since 1895, and at the same station the day temperature only reached 18°F. Throughout the last week of the month easterly winds prevailed over most of the country and, with low pressure over the Bay of Biscay and slow moving fronts lying along the English Channel, southern England had frequent outbreaks of rain or snow. In western Scotland, Northern Ireland and much of north-west England, however, the weather was fine and cold and daily sunshine exceeded 9 hours at times in Northern Ireland and the Hebrides. By the 27th, rain from the Atlantic was affecting Northern Ireland and western Scotland and during the last day of the month there was exceptionally heavy rain in western Scotland although it was unusually fine and sunny in south-east England.

Pressure and Wind.—The mean pressure was everywhere below the average for the period 1921–50; the deviation at 9h. ranged from –2.5 mb. at Stornoway to –11.6 mb. at Tunbridge Wells. Winds were mainly between south and west until the 9th, from a northerly direction until the 19th and then mainly easterly except for the last two days. Gales occurred in Scotland on 14 days, and in England and Wales on the 1st–5th (in Devon–Cornwall), 7th–9th, 12th, 13th, 16th and 23rd–25th; gales were widespread on the 8th. Among the highest gusts registered in knots were 77 at Stornoway on the 28th, 68 and 67 at Scilly and The Lizard respectively on the 5th, and 63 at Aberporth on the 7th.

Temperature.—Mean temperature differed from the average for the period 1921–50 by –4.9 in England and Wales, –5.9 in Scotland and –6.1 in Northern Ireland. Except for February 1947 it was the coldest month in the British Isles since 1895 and extreme temper-

atures were lower locally than in 1947. Scotland experienced a sequence of very cold nights on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th. Screen temperatures at Dalwhinnie fell to –7°F., –5°F. and –5°F. respectively on these three nights while the corresponding readings at Dyce were 5°F., –5°F., and 2°F.

Extreme temperatures included:—(England and Wales) 59°F. at Cannington on the 8th, –1°F. at Houghall on the 20th; (Scotland) 55°F. at Lephinmore, Loch Fyne, on the 1st, –13°F. at Braemar on the 23rd—this is the lowest screen temperature recorded in the British Isles for 60 years; (Northern Ireland) 55°F. at Ballykelly on the 7th, 4°F. at Garvagh on the 20th.

Precipitation.—The general precipitation expressed as a percentage of the average for the period 1881–1915 was 103 over England and Wales, 87 over Scotland and 122 over Northern Ireland. In Scotland totals were generally above the average in the east but less than half the average in south and west Perthshire and in eastern parts of Argyllshire and Ayrshire. In England and Wales precipitation was above the average in most of the eastern counties and the north Midlands. It was more than 175 per cent. of the average in south Lincolnshire, north Cambridgeshire and in parts of Northumberland; in the south it was more than the average in Somerset, Devonshire and Cornwall, and more than 150 per cent. of the average in south-west Cornwall. An outstanding feature of the month's precipitation was the torrential rain in the west of Scotland on the 28th. A large area received over 3 in. in 24 hours, and there were some reports of more than 5 in.

Among the heaviest falls in 24 hours or less were:—

6th 2.00 in. at Foffany Reservoir (Co. Down).
28th 5.75 in. at Inverailort (Inverness-shire), 5.30 in. at Stornachullin Ardrishaig (Argyllshire), 5.04 in. at Glenbranter (Argyllshire).

Snow.—In Scotland snow or sleet fell daily, and moderate or heavy falls occurred on most days between the 9th and 22nd. As in January the north and north-east were severely affected where the depth of undrifted snow reached about two feet; food supplies were again dropped by aircraft to isolated communities. Drummuir (Banffshire) reported level snow lying to a depth of 36 in. on the 21st. In England the north-east was most severely affected; in parts of Northumberland snow lay over a foot deep from the 22nd till the end of the month. On the 23rd there was a particularly violent snowstorm in the south-west when snow fell continuously for 16 hours, and nearly every road in Cornwall was snowbound.

Thunderstorms.—Thunderstorms occurred locally on 9th–12th and 18th; locally in north-east Scotland and more widely in Wales on the 17th; locally in the south-west on the 4th and widely on the 20th.

Sunshine.—The general sunshine expressed as a percentage of the average for the period 1921–50 was 122 over England and Wales, 142 over Scotland and 117 over Northern Ireland. In Cornwall sunshine was below the average but the average was exceeded in most other districts. In north and west Scotland there was about double the usual amount. Stornoway's total of 96 hours was its highest since 1881, while Oban with 113 hours had its sunniest February for 40 years. Holyhead also recorded 113 hours, its previous highest February total being 108 hours in 1930.

Fog.—Fog occurred on most days at one place or another. It was widespread, persisting locally into the afternoon, on the 17th–20th, 23rd and 24th.

Miscellaneous Phenomena.—The aurora was observed in Scotland on 17 nights.