

December 2003

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1961-1990.

UK overview

A very changeable month across all parts. Most areas, except for Northern Ireland, experienced above average rainfall. Mean temperature slightly above average across all of the UK, with most Eastern areas having well above average sunshine.

Kinbrace (Highland) recorded a temperature of -16.1 °C on 31st. Glenlivet (Moray) reported 10 cm of lying snow on 22nd. Shap Fell (Cumbria) reported just over 80 mm in 18 hours on 26th.

England and Wales diary of highlights

Very changeable. Dry, foggy, frosty spells alternated with wet and windy periods.

1st to 2nd With low pressure in the English Channel, it was a very wet start to the month, however the rain gradually died out during the 2nd.

3rd to 9th An anticyclone built up to the north with a significant cold front moving south on the 6th. The high moved to the continent by the 7th and to the Balkans by the 9th, maintaining a ridge and mainly dry weather over the region. It was cloudy at first becoming mainly sunny later with overnight patchy fog and frost. The east Midlands and East Anglia were foggy most of the 3rd, also in north-east England on the 4th.

10th to 14th After some freezing fog at first in places on 10th, depressions passing to the north, brought bands of rain or showers which were heavy at times, especially in the north-west. It was mild or very mild in southern areas between 11th and 13th before cooler north-west winds arrived later. Teignmouth (Devon) reached 14.9 °C on 11th.

15th to 19th High pressure returned to the region and moved to northern France by the 16th, then to the Balkans by the 18th but maintaining its influence throughout. It was mainly dry with overnight frost, widespread at times. Mist and fog patches were reported on the 17th and 18th in places and in the south on the 19th.

20th to 22nd A deep depression formed over the UK bringing widespread heavy rain to most areas. The low moved east to Denmark during the 21st allowing cold northerly winds with heavy wintry showers in its rear. High ground in the north and north-west including Wales received snow cover as did the eastern coastal counties down to Lincolnshire in the evening. Early on the 22nd more snow fell in eastern counties down to Suffolk and in Yorkshire some roads became blocked. A ridge of high pressure then moved in snuffing out any remaining wintry showers.

23rd to 26th Low pressure to the north heralded the return of mild damp westerly winds. Although mostly dry at first, rain became more widespread over Christmas. Boxing Day especially in north-west England and Wales, where showers turned thundery later. 80 mm was recorded in 18 hours at Shap Fell in Cumbria on the 26th.

27th to 31st As low pressure transferred to Scandinavia a colder northerly wind ensued. Southern counties were deluged during the three days 27th to 29th as heavy rain, thundery at times, promenaded along the south coast. There was some sleet or snow later on adjacent high ground. Further north clearer skies allowed widespread frost, severe and persisting throughout the day in places on the 29th and 30th. Shap Fell in

Cumbria registered -11.4 °C overnight on the 30th/31st. As the month closed a vigorous low to the north-west pushed rain bands across the region which turned to snow over the high ground of northern England and Wales.

Scotland diary of highlights

Contrasting weather types.

The weather of December was very changeable. There were changes of weather type every few days, with large contrasts between dry and wet spells, mild and frosty conditions, and overcast and sunny skies.

Between the 1st and the 3rd a depression in the English Channel caused north-easterly winds to blow across Scotland. This brought cloud and occasional rain to most places on the 2nd, but fair weather in the north-west on the 1st, returned on the 3rd and advanced slowly across the country.

On the 4th and 5th high pressure became established to the west of Ireland and mild air tracking around the north of this reached Scotland from the north-west. Cloud spread south across the country on the 4th but it became very mild in Aberdeenshire with the temperature rising to 15 °C at Aboyne and Dyce on both days.

The anticyclone moved south-east into Europe between the 6th and 8th but continued to dominate Scotland's weather. A cold front crossed Scotland between the 5th and 6th so that it was much colder than before. It was rather cloudy in the north but sunny in the south until fog formed on the 8th. On that day the temperature rose to only -2 °C at Strathallan and fell to -12 °C at Aviemore during the night.

From the 9th to the 12th low pressure to the north brought south-westerly winds across Scotland. These gave mild and cloudy conditions with rain at times on three out of the four days with 27 mm recorded at Sloy on the 9th. However, a transient ridge behind a cold front gave a cooler and sunnier day on the 11th.

The low pressure in the Norwegian Sea moved into Scandinavia from the 13th to the 15th, turning the winds over Scotland into the north. There were gales for a time, with a gust of 71 mph at Fair Isle on the 14th. The weather became sunny in the south but there were wintry showers in the north.

High pressure became established over Europe between the 16th and 18th and south-westerly winds returned to Scotland. The weather was mild and cloudy with some rain in the north-west.

From the 19th to the 21st low pressure near Iceland developed to cover Scotland before transferring to Scandinavia. Colder air from the north covered Scotland and a thoroughly wet day was experienced on the 20th with 35 mm of precipitation at Carterhouse. Snow fell on high ground and there were frequent snow showers in the north on a northerly gale the next day. Gusts reached 61 mph at Kirkwall and 10 cm of snow accumulated at Glenlivet.

High pressure became slow moving near Biscay from the 22nd to the 27th and mild and cloudy westerly winds covered Scotland. There was plenty of rain in the west and a 5-day total of 149 mm was recorded at Dalmally. On Christmas Eve there was 67 mm of rain at Sloy and a gust of 61 mph at Lerwick.

On the 27th low pressure moved across the North Sea, bringing a northerly gale over Scotland on the 28th that was followed by a slack pressure field. Snow showers fell over western hills on the 27th and they transferred to the north on the 28th. Thereafter it became very cold and clear with the temperature falling to -16 °C at Kinbrace on the 31st. Later that day fronts associated with an Atlantic depression pushed southerly gales and a band of rain and snow east across the country, creating blizzards over high ground for a while.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

Mild and locally quite dry and sunny.

Accumulated rainfall was below average up to the 18th, then the remainder of the month was quite wet by comparison, with the two wettest days, 19th and 31st, accounting for almost half of the months total in some areas.

1st to 9th Generally mild and dry, although with a widespread frost recorded early on the 1st.

10th to 13th Rainfall recorded on all days, and frequent changes from mild to cooler weather. Very sunny on the 11th.

14th to 18th Again predominantly dry and a little cooler, but with only slight frosts on some nights.

19th to 25th Very wet on 19th, with further rainfall on following days, although drier on 23rd and 24th. Brief colder spell on 20th/21st with some traces of sleet and snow.

26th to 31st Changeable, but also much colder, with widespread moderate, locally severe frosts on 29th and 30th. Snowfalls recorded early on the 30th across western areas in particular, followed by progressively milder and wetter weather on 31st.

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