

Search logo

Search

[Met Office logo](#)[Home](#) [Media Centre](#) [Toolkits](#) [150th anniversary](#) [Great weather events - the winter of 1962/63](#)

Space

[Weather and climate](#) | [Aviation](#) | [Leisure](#) | [Research](#) | [Education](#) | [Product catalogue](#) | [Services for business](#)

Space

[Page Top](#)[Spacer](#)

150th anniversary

[underline](#)

Great weather events - the winter of 1962/63

The winter of 1962/63 was tobogganing heaven for the nation's children but the cold and snow would offer a challenge of a different kind for just about everyone else. Glasgow had its first white Christmas since 1938 when rain turned to snow as it moved south, and a belt of snow became almost stationary over southern England on Boxing Day. The following day five centimetres of snow lay in the Channel Islands, with 30 cm covering much of southern England. The initial effect of this snowfall was to bring transport to a standstill, delay schools opening and force the cancellation of sporting events - but more snow was on the way.

On 29 and 30 December a blizzard across south-west England and Wales left drifts six metres deep which blocked roads and rail routes, left villages cut off and brought down power lines. Thanks to further falls and almost continual near-freezing temperatures, snow was still deep on the ground across much of the country three months later.

In the intervals when snow was not falling, the country simply appeared to freeze solid - January daytime temperatures barely crept above freezing, and night frosts produced a temperature of -16 °C in places as far apart as Gatwick and Eskdalemuir. Freezing fog was a frequent hazard - but the spectacular rime deposits that built up over successive days were a photographer's dream.

January was the month when even the sea froze (out to half a mile from the shore at Herne Bay), the Thames froze right across in places, and ice floes appeared on the river at Tower Bridge. Everywhere birds literally dropped off their perches - killed by the cold and lack of natural food.

February was marked by more snow arriving on south-easterly winds during the first week, with a 36-hour blizzard hitting western parts of the country. Drifts 20 feet deep formed in gale-force winds (gusts in excess of 70 knots were common, and a gust of 103 knots was recorded on the Isle of Man). Many rural communities found themselves cut off for the tenth time since Christmas. Throughout the winter thousands of sheep, cattle and ponies starved because it was impossible to get enough fodder to them.

A slight lull in the wintry proceedings happened around mid-month, but in the third week of February it was the turn of the north-west UK to suffer - in Cumberland the snowfall was reckoned to be the worst in living memory. By the end of the month the weather over the country had reverted to 'normal' - cold but clear and sunny days with severe night frosts and freezing fog.

A gradual thaw then set in - the morning of 6 March 1963 was the first day in the year that the entire country was frost free, and the temperature soared to 17 °C in London. Temperatures recovered, and long icicles playfully speared into snowdrifts by children in January, finally started to shrink. Monster snowmen and snowballs - now adrift and melting in the green 'seas' of gardens and playing fields - were soon all that was left of the winter that was probably the coldest since 1795.

[More from Education about the winters of 1947 and 1963](#)

[Spacer](#)[www.metoffice.com](#) ©Crown copyright[Print page](#)[Met Office](#)[How to find us](#)[International](#)[Library and Archive](#)[History](#)[How are we doing?](#)[Vacancies](#)[Terms and conditions](#)[Learn](#)[News release archive](#)[From the bookshelf](#)[Learn](#)[About the weather](#)[Services](#)[Weathercall](#)[Mobile text forecasts](#)[Weathercall](#)[Marinecall](#)[Mountain weather](#)[MetWEB](#)[Talk to a forecaster](#)[Contact](#)[Contact us](#)