

Snow-it-all guide to Britain's big chill



TOP TEN COLDEST YEARS

1684

This is widely regarded as the coldest winter in British history because average temperatures stayed below zero for two months. The River Thames froze for more than two months, thanks to a January 6C colder than the long-term average for the month. Although there have been lower temperatures recorded for short spells, in 1684 the average temperature in January was -3C and in February was -1C.

1739-40

In late December temperatures dropped to -9C and felt even colder because of biting winds. The following January was one of the coldest months on record.

1962-63

The third coldest winter. December began with the last great London smog, then gales, before the snow arrived over Christmas. Snow covered most of the country for 67 consecutive days. On January 13, -16C was recorded at Gatwick, -20.6C in Hertfordshire, and the sea froze off the south coast.

1940

January averaged -1.4C. Mid-month, the Thames froze for the first time since 1880. In places snow was so thick that the ice brought down tree branches and phone wires.

1881

More than 2ft of snow paralysed Britain when galeforce blizzards battered the whole country. Bury St Edmunds, in Suffolk, recorded a temperature of -21.7C on Christmas Day.

1927-28

Saw one of the heaviest snowfalls of the 20th century. Blizzards began on Christmas Day in the Midlands and Wales, and then spread south by Boxing Day. In Kent, there was 2ft of level snow, and drifts of 20ft were measured in the Chilterns.

1947

January saw the start of one of the longest periods of lying snows in British history. Snow fell somewhere in the country every day from January 22 to 17 March 17. Nearly a quarter of the nation's sheep died. At Writtle, Essex, on January 29, a temperature of -21C was recorded, and most of East Anglia experienced nothing warmer than -5C. Oxford had 16 consecutive days of frost, and Kew had no sunshine for 20 days from January 2.

1933

Towards the end of February came one of the worst blizzards to hit Britain. In parts of the North, Wales and the Midlands, there were 48 hours' continuous snowfall, and elsewhere it was almost as bad. Huddersfield had more than 2ft of lying snow and there were 14ft drifts on Yorkshire's moors and dales. Villages from the Midlands to the Scottish borders were cut off.

1952

From December 5-9, there was one of the worst smogs ever to envelope London. This combined with the bitter cold to cause 12,000 deaths. The rest of the winter brought snows, storms and prolonged sub-zero temperatures.

1978-79

A blizzard hit the South on New Year's Eve, bringing Heathrow Airport to a standstill for days. January averaged -0.4C.