



Exceptional weather events

Type of event:

Cold spell

Date:

January-February 1963

SEVERE COLD SPELL OF EARLY 1963

Forty years ago, Ireland experienced one of the most persistent cold spells since weather measurements began in the country. In common with most of western Europe, bitterly cold weather set in around the Christmas period of 1962 and persisted with only brief milder periods until early March. During this period easterly winds were directed over Ireland by a large Scandinavian anticyclone, with occasional depressions bringing falls of snow, some of which were heavy. England and Wales recorded their coldest 2-month spell since January/February of 1740, while at most Irish stations the mean daily temperature for January 1963 was the lowest recorded for any month before or since (see table on right). These include the long-term stations at Birr, Valentia Observatory and Roche's Point, Co. Cork, where observations began more than a century ago. Other long-term stations came close to their coldest ever month: at Malin Head, only January 1941 was colder (with a mean of 2.4°C), while at Dublin (Phoenix Park) the lowest mean monthly value of -0.5°C dates back to January 1881.

Mean daily temperatures (°C)
at selected stations for January 1963

station	mean temperature	records since
Belmullet	1.2*	1956
Birr	-0.5*	1900
Claremorris	-0.7*	1950
Clones	-0.2*	1951
Cork Airport	0.7*	1962
Dublin Airport	0.9	1941
Dublin (Phoenix Park)	0.4	1855
Kilkenny	-0.5*	1957
Malin Head	2.5	1885
Mullingar	-0.7*	1950
Roche's Point	2.3*	1876
Rosslare	1.8*	1956
Shannon Airport	-0.4*	1945
Valentia Observatory	2.3*	1892

(* indicates lowest mean monthly temperature on record at the station)

There was a total of between 40 and 50 days with air frost at inland stations during January and February of 1963 compared with the normal number for the period of around 20, while even at coastal stations there were between 20 and 25 days with air frost compared with the normal range here of 5 to 7. Air temperatures fell below -10°C in many inland areas on January 13th and 14th. Although both months were relatively dry, with the exception of some heavy falls in southern counties during February, most of the precipitation which fell during the period was in the form of snow. The first major falls were during the last week of 1962, with particularly heavy falls on the 30th and 31st of December. Casement Aerodrome measured a snow depth of 45cm on the morning of the 31st. Another heavy snowfall occurred on January 15th and snow lay on the ground in many places until a spell of milder weather in early February. Drifts of up to 6 metres caused severe disruption to traffic, while the *Limerick Leader* reported that for the first time in living memory the frozen River Shannon could be crossed on foot near the city. Further east in Europe, the weather was particularly severe. Ice formed on many North Sea and English Channel harbours, with sea ice also reported.

January / February 1963 : Mean daily 0-24h temperatures (°C)

