

Exceptional weather events

Type of event: Heavy Snowfalls

Date: 1917

Heavy Snowfalls of 1917

The great Irish snowfall of January 25th and 26th lay persistently on the ground till February 18th. At Ballinacurra near Cork the measurement on the 24th was 52mm and on the 25th 19mm and at Seskin the total amount of snow on 25th and 26th yielded, when melted, 47 mm of water. 1mm of water is equivalent to 1.2cm of snow. On 25th the wind strengthened to a gale in the south of Ireland, when there were heavy falls of snow covering the ground to a depth of a foot or more.

An even more severe snow storm struck on the 1st April 1917. Many places were cut off for several days. Snow lay to an estimated depth of 1.3 m with drifts of 3.0 m. In 1917 falls in Ireland, at least in the south and west, were the heaviest since February, 1892, and probably the heaviest in the whole 50 years (back to 1876).

21/1/1917 – 27/1/1917

The prevailing northeast to east or southeast winds were frequently strong or high, and locally attained the force of a gale. Over Great Britain generally there was little or no snow, but during the latter half of the week unusually heavy falls occurred in Ireland, mainly in the south. At Seskin, the fall on the 25th yielded 25mm of water, this was followed by 22mm on 26th and about 10mm on the 27th. The drifts were nearly 3 metres deep, and the average depth on level ground was at least 30cm. Over a large area in Ireland railway traffic was stopped owing to the heavy snow.

28/1/1917 to 3/2/1917

The low maximum temperatures prevented the snow which had fallen during the preceding week from thawing to any considerable extent, and it was reported from Seskin, that the bye-roads in that neighbourhood were still impassable, though traffic carried on, with difficulty on the main roads. Little fresh snow fell during the week.

Below is a vivid insight into the extreme rigour of the season in south-central Ireland , published in Symon's Meteorological Magazine.

THE GREAT SNOWSTORM ON THE 1st APRIL, 1917.

THE people in East Clare will long remember Palm Sunday, 1917. A little snow fell on the night of March 31st, but it was all melted by noon on April 1st. It began to snow again at 2.45 p.m. on that day, and at 5.30 p.m. it was 9 inches deep on all the roads about Broadford. Two motor cars came to Broadford early in the afternoon and had to stay there till the morning of the 4th. The mail car left Broadford at 6.40 p.m. for Limerick, and did not get there till the evening of the 2nd. Thus taking 24 hours to do 12 miles. The direct road from Broadford to Killaloe is only 8 miles over the mountain. The first four miles of which, to the village of Kilbane, is nearly level, Kilbane being 200 feet above the sea. A mile further on the road gets to the top of the pass of Slounagalough, 892 feet above the sea. It then falls 700 feet in half-a-mile, and the last 2½ miles to Killaloe is nearly level. On April 1st a man named James Vaughan (aged 40) and his nephew, Michael Vaughan (aged 12), who both live at Kilbane, drove a trap to Killaloe. On their way home that evening, they were caught in the snow storm . They left their trap at a farm house at the foot of the eastern side of the pass, and started to walk home, leading the horse with them. On the evening of the 2nd some men went to the top of the pass, looking for sheep that had been lost in the snow, and were much surprised to see a horse standing there with harness on him. In a short time they found the two Vaughans lying dead in the snow. There was very severe frost that night. My thermometer here went down to 16°. Only once before (viz., on February 4th) during the past very severe winter, was it so low. No doubt they were killed by the great cold, as there is not a bit of shelter to be found on the "Sap Road" as it is called locally. Very few cars ever go over this road, though I have seen a map for motorists, on which it was marked as the main road to Killaloe. And it is said that one night, some time ago, a strange motor car did actually drive over the "Sap." The driver no doubt driving by the map.

On Monday, April 2nd, Broadford was quite cut off from the outside world. No mail car came or went. All the roads being quite blocked up with snow drifts, several feet deep. The day was very fine, however, with a bright warm sun. The snow on the level ground, where it had not drifted, was 12 inches deep. But just about the rain gauge it was 18 inches deep. That is 6 inches over the rim of the gauge. Never before has the gauge been quite hid by snow, during the thirty-two years it has been here.

On Tuesday, April 3rd, it was snowing nearly all day and very cold. A mail car came from Quin railway station at 2 p.m. The road here from there being fairly level ground was not blocked with snow. But the mail car from Broadford to Scariff, which started at 2.30 p.m.,