

DECEMBER 2000.

The month began with low pressure systems still surrounding much of the country, with others strung out across the Atlantic. With winds from a predominantly southerly direction, temperatures remained relatively high for the time of the year with maxima ranging from 10.5C {50.9F} to 12.4C [54.3F]. During the first week there was no ground or air frost, though grass temperatures did fall as low as 0.7C [33.2F] on the 3rd.

It was a very wet week, rainfall totalling 60mm [2.36ins] over the period, with 24.8mm [0.98in] of this falling overnight on the 7th/8th. Some of the rain was also very heavy and was falling at a rate of 49mm/hr [1.93ins/hr] at 17h on the 5th. On at least four occasions rain was falling at rates in excess of 10mm/hr [0.39in].

Sunshine was very limited amounting to no more than 18.5 hours over the week, the "best" day providing just 4 hours on the 2nd and with two days registering nil. Hill fog was prevalent with mainly stratus cloud much of the time though the strong winds prevented any fog. Gusts reached 38 knots [46mph] on the 7th as a deep depression tracked across the country.

The second week remained unsettled but very mild, maximum temperatures reaching 12.6C [54.7F] on the 11th. Throughout the week the maximum temperature range was from 12.6C [54.7F] on the 11th to 6.2C [43.2F] on the 14th as cooler air came in on northerly winds when a deep depression settled over Scandinavia. Conditions then became far more seasonal with cooler, but much drier Polar air flooding across the UK.

Rainfall continued unabated over the 7 days totalling 36.8mm [1.45ins]. Two days saw the bulk of this, the 10th with 14.2mm [0.56in] and the 12th with 11.7mm [0.46in]. No day was completely dry, the lowest fall being 1mm [0.04in] on the 8th.

However, the sun did manage to shine, just a little, the total for the week amounting to no more than 5.6 hours, with the 11th and 12 completely sunless and a mere 0.2 hour each on the 8th and 9th, a miserable week all told.

The third week began much more promisingly, with blue skies and sunshine, though with a sharp ground frost, temperatures on the grass falling as low as -4.3C [24.3F] on the 15th. Though the cold weather continued, it did remain relatively unsettled with rain, or drizzle, for much of the week though only in small quantities, the total rainfall for the week amounting to no more than 3.7mm [0.15in]. After the 15th, when we had 5.8 hours of sunshine, it became predominantly dull with just 6.9 hours for the week. However, it remained cold with ground frosts on 5 consecutive nights, the worst to -6.2C [20.8F] on the 16th. By the end of the week air temperatures had also begun a gradual decline, ending with a maximum of just 5.6C [42.1F] by the 21st.

Christmas week began dull, damp and dismal with a rather cold easterly wind blowing. On the 24th an active cold front began its progress southwards dragging behind it much colder, Polar air. The front also brought substantial rainfall on its leading edge, a total of 6.3mm {0.25in} falling in a little under 7 hours overnight on the 23rd/24th. The week as a whole saw a total of 20.9mm [0.82in] of precipitation falling, 6.4mm of this as snow overnight on the 27th/28th. Sunshine was sparse amounting to no more than 17.7 hours for the week, though this was much better than earlier weeks.

It turned very cold with frost at night and almost through the entire day on the 28th. Overnight temperatures above snow fell to -7.9C [17.8F] on the 28th with air temperatures as low as -4.3C [24.4F].

The final few days saw weather the like of which had not occurred for 10 years, with deep snow and biting cold. Ground temperatures fell to -14.3C [6.3F] and air to -11.0C [12.2F] overnight on the 28th/29th, the coldest weather since 1987. Snow lay to a level depth of 8cm and thawed little. The snow cover persisted for the final 4 days of the month with night temperatures plunging over the snowfield. Heavy snow began to fall on the 31st as a depression moved into the UK but this quickly turned to sleet, then rain giving a fall of 13.3mm [0.52in] by 09hr on the 1st January by which time all of the snow had gone.