

THE WEATHER IN NEW ZEALAND IN FEBRUARY 1983

General—February was a cool month, with below average rainfalls everywhere except Southland and South Otago.

South-westerly winds were more frequent than usual this month, with Auckland having its highest frequency of winds from this quarter for February since 1965 and Invercargill its greatest number for February since 1972. There were also more strong winds than usual at Invercargill. Farmers in the North Island and the north of the South Island reported poor grass growth due to the dry weather this month.

Horticulture was also affected, with orchardists in many areas reporting small-sized fruit this year. Apiarists in the south of the country had a poor season due to cool windy conditions, and honey production was well down. The very dry conditions in the North Island meant that fire bans were continued in many areas. An extensive scrub and grassland fire burned for 3½ days between the 4th and 8th in central North Island, burning 350 square kilometres and involving 600 fire fighters.

Rainfall—Rainfall for the whole country was below normal, with the exception of Southland and coastal South Otago, where rainfall was normal or slightly above normal. Apart from areas of Nelson and Marlborough the rest of the South Island had between 10 and 50 percent of normal rainfall. Parts of Nelson and Marlborough were without rain this month. Among those stations recording nil rainfall were Havelock, Grovetown, Picton, and Queen Charlotte College, while Onamalutu and Linkwater had less than one millimetre. The North Island was also very dry.

Apart from some areas of Wanganui and Central Districts and in Whangarei where about 80 percent of normal rainfall was recorded, the rest of the North Island had less than half the usual February rainfall. Areas around East Cape and Gisborne were particularly dry, with less than 10 percent of normal rainfall recorded at many stations.

Temperatures—Mean temperatures were about 1°C below normal over the whole country this month, with the exception of Cape Reinga and Mount Cook, where they were normal.

There were several particularly cool periods, including the 5th–6th, when mean temperatures were 3°C–6°C lower than average in the South Island and 2°C to 4°C lower in the North Island. Temperatures everywhere were 3°C–7°C below average during the 8th and 9th.

There was only one notably mild period, the 2nd and 3rd when maximum temperatures were especially high in Otago and Southland. Earnsclough recorded 35.2°C on the 2nd (the highest for February since recording began in 1948), and Invercargill 29.8°C—its highest for February since 1949. Mean temperatures were generally normal or above between the 16th and 18th and again during the last few days of the month.

Sunshine—Sunshine hours were normal or above normal in eastern, southern and some central areas of the North Island and in Nelson but were below normal elsewhere. Auckland and Invercargill were particularly dull. Auckland recorded only 147 hours of sunshine (its second lowest for February since records began in 1963) and Invercargill 136 hours—its lowest for February since 1961 and the 3rd lowest for the month since recording began in 1932.

Among those stations with the greatest departures this month were: Auckland City (–53 hours), Hokitika (–58 hours), Oamaru (–33 hours) and Dunedin (–28 hours).

THE WEATHER SEQUENCE—FEBRUARY 1983

1–7 February

A large anticyclone, centred near Lord Howe Island and covering the Tasman Sea, brought fine, cool weather to all New Zealand on the 1st and fine, milder weather to most districts on the 2nd and 3rd. The position of the anticyclone to the north-west of New Zealand resulted in a south-westerly flow over the country and a series of fronts within this flow crossed the South Island, bringing showers to southern and western areas on the 3rd, 4th, 6th, and 7th and to central districts on the 5th. The weather in the rest of the country continued to be fine, though rather cool, throughout this period.

8–14 February

A broad trough crossed the country during the 8th and 9th. Fronts within this trough brought rain to the north and west of the South Island and to all the North Island except coastal areas of Gisborne and Hawke's Bay on the 8th and light showers to isolated western areas on the 9th. The anticyclone, although it had weakened, still remained centred close to Lord Howe Island and by the 11th it had extended a ridge onto New Zealand. The weather became fine and cool during the 11th and 12th.

A front began to move onto the south of the South Island during the 12th and became slow moving over the North Island during the 13th and 14th. There were showers in the south of the North Island on the 13th and in the north on the 14th. The weather was fine elsewhere as a belt of high pressure covered the country.

15–21 February

The belt of high pressure still covered the country on the 15th, with centres to the east and west of the South Island. Apart from showers in Northland, the weather was fine during the 15th and 16th. The high pressure belt began to move away to the east on the 17th and a trough in the southern Tasman Sea approached the South Island. There were showers in the south-west of the South Island on the 17th, becoming more widespread in the South Island on the 18th and 19th as the trough crossed the country and weakened. By the 20th a belt of high pressure had again developed over the South Island, with the weather becoming generally fine and cool apart from isolated showers in some eastern areas on the 21st.

22–28 February

A large anticyclone developed over New Zealand on the 22nd, with centres to the east and west of the country. This remained over New Zealand until the 24th, bringing fine weather to all areas, apart from isolated showers in Fiordland and South Westland. On the 24th a front, moving within the anticyclone, began to cross New Zealand, and rain fell in southern and western areas of the South Island and some south-western areas of the North Island.

The front had weakened considerably by the 25th and the showers cleared. On the 27th a second front moved onto the south of the South Island, with showers in Fiordland and Southland on the 27th, spreading into Westland and Otago on the 28th. All other areas had fine weather due to the continued presence of the anticyclone over the country.

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J. S. HICKMAN, Director.