

THE NEW ZEALAND WEATHER IN FEBRUARY 1982

General—February was a warm, dry month with close to average sunshine.

In the north of the country, north-easterly winds were most frequent, which is usual for February, though the winds were generally lighter than normal. North-westerly winds predominated in the south, which had more strong winds than usual. Pressures were slightly higher than average except in the north of the North Island.

Farmers in many areas suffered feed shortages and began feeding out early due to drought or near-drought conditions in areas of low rainfall this month. Although rainfall at the end of the month eased these conditions, rising facial eczema spore counts began causing some concern, particularly in areas which were affected last year. A frost in some inland areas of the North Island on the 7th caused local crop damage.

The low rainfall and high temperatures led to many scrub and bush fires this month and extensive fire bans were imposed.

Rainfall—Most of the country was drier than normal this month, with eastern areas north of Dunedin in the South Island and central areas in the North Island being particularly dry. Areas having rainfall totals above normal this month were Northland, Coromandel, Bay of Plenty, East Cape, Gisborne, Manawatu and south Wairarapa in the North Island and Blenheim, south Westland, Fiordland, Southland and parts of Otago in the South Island.

During the first 18 days of this month much of New Zealand had little or no rainfall and, following the generally dry conditions of January, extensive areas with drought or near drought conditions developed. This included many of those areas that showed near or above normal totals by the end of the month as a consequence of heavy rainfalls from the 18th onwards. Many parts of the country had little significant rain between late December and the falls on the 18th or 22nd–23rd of February.

Temperature—The effects of the lack of rainfall this month were accentuated by temperatures that were, on average, 1°C above normal over the whole country.

Some high temperatures were recorded in central and southern parts of the North Island on the 9th. These included 32.8°C at Palmerston North and 30.4°C in Waiouru, (respectively the highest temperatures since recording began in 1962) 29.6°C at Karioi Forest (the second highest since 1930) and 30.1°C in Kelburn, Wellington—a temperature only equalled once and exceeded once, since 1870.

Temperatures above 30.0°C were recorded in many parts of the South Island on several days this month, but particularly high temperatures were reached in parts of Otago and Canterbury on the 15th. These included 38.5°C at Ashburton 37.7°C at Timaru Airport, 37.4°C at Temuka, 36.9°C at Christchurch Airport, 36.3°C at Winchmore and 35.2°C at Earnscleugh. In many cases these temperatures have only been exceeded by the record temperatures of February 1973.

There was a cold spell on the 5th and 6th, with frost recorded in some central North Island areas and fresh snow to 1500 m on Mt Egmont and 1000 m on some South Island ranges.

Sunshine—Sunshine totals were close to normal this month for most of the country. Those areas with greatest departures were: Christchurch Airport (+40 hours), Wellington (+39 hours), Timaru (+31 hours), Gisborne (–29 hours), and Rotorua (–16 hours).

THE WEATHER SEQUENCE, FEBRUARY 1982

1st–7th February

During the first week of February the weather was strongly influenced by the passage of a series of anticyclones across the country, bringing fine weather to most districts through most of the week. Eastern areas had rain at times between the 2nd and 4th as a deep depression, formerly tropical cyclone "Hettie", moved south-eastwards down the coast of New Zealand. On the 5th a front within a trough crossed the country and brought rain to most districts, with some heavy falls in the north and north-east of the North Island and south of the South Island. This had cleared from most areas by the 6th and an anticyclone in the western Tasman Sea began to extend a ridge over the country bringing settled weather to most districts on the 7th.

8th–14th February

The anticyclone which lay in the Tasman Sea at the end of the first week moved slowly eastward onto the country between the 8th and 10th, bringing fine warm weather, with temperatures above 30°C in many places on the 9th. There were showers at times in southern and south-western areas as a front within a westerly flow passed to the south of the country. This had moved away by the 12th and a belt of high pressure lay across the country, with centres to the east and west. The whole country had warm, dry weather for the last two days of this week.

15th–21st February

The anticyclone remained over New Zealand and fine, warm conditions continued, although a cold front associated with a depression near Macquarie Island brought rain to Westland and Fiordland on the 17th. The anticyclone weakened and moved east on the 18th and a cold front moved onto the country bringing rain to western and southern areas of both Islands. Rain became more widespread as a series of fronts within a trough moved across the country. By the 20th rain had cleared from most areas except the north and east of the North Island. Temperatures were cool. On the 21st an anticyclone moved onto southern New Zealand bringing fine but cool weather to most districts, although parts of the north and east of the North Island had light rain due to the cold front which remained to the north-east.

22nd–28th February

The cold front to the north-east intensified during the 22nd, bringing heavy rain to much of the North Island. A depression developed on this front, which, by the 23rd, covered much of the North Island and rain became widespread, apart from southern and western areas, over the next two days. An intensive anticyclone developed near Chatham Island during the 24th, maintaining a northerly flow over the country. The frontal system continued to develop within this flow, with most parts of the country having rain at times until the 27th, when there was a general clearance in the weather. There were some showers in Fiordland and Southland on the 27th as a front associated with a depression in the Southern Tasman Sea lay off Westland. Showers spread northward as this front moved onto the South Island during the 28th.

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