

THE NEW ZEALAND WEATHER IN MARCH 1982

General—The weather in March was variable, being generally cool with average rain in the North Island and mild and dry for most of the South Island.

Light winds were more frequent than usual in both the north and south of the country and there were greater frequencies than usual of north-easterlies in the south and south-easterlies in the north this month. South-westerly winds were generally less frequent than usual.

Farmers in many North Island areas recorded the presence of facial eczema on their farms, with some bad outbreaks reported in the Gisborne and Taranaki districts. Very dry weather continued to cause problems, especially with stock feeding, in northern and eastern areas of the South Island.

A hailstorm on the 23rd caused considerable damage in orchards around Nelson and Motueka.

Rainfall—Rainfalls were above average in central and some eastern areas of the North Island, south Westland and Fiordland. Parts of Wellington and northern and eastern areas of the South Island had low rainfalls for the third month, with most areas having less than half their normal rainfall and parts of central and south Canterbury having less than 25 percent of their usual March rainfall.

South Westland and Fiordland had sustained heavy rainfalls during the period between the 9th and 12th. Among the heavier falls recorded for this period were: Mt Cook 440 mm, Paringa 585 mm, Fox Glacier 630 mm, Haast 312 mm and estimated falls for Milford Sound and Franz Josef Glacier were 750 mm and 680 mm respectively. During the resultant extensive flooding telephone and power lines south of Whataroa were cut, roads were closed by washouts at the Cook and Fox River bridge approaches and the Waikukupa bridge collapsed. There were several slips on the Franz Josef-Fox highway and much of the Fox Glacier road was washed away.

Temperature—Mean monthly temperatures were about 0.5°C below normal in the North Island, apart from North Cape, and parts of Wellington and Wairarapa which were slightly warmer than usual. In the South Island mean temperatures were 1°C above average for the month and in parts of Canterbury and the Nelson Lakes district were about 2°C above average.

Some warm temperatures were recorded in eastern districts during a period of north-westerlies between the 9th and 11th. Temperatures above 30°C were recorded in Timaru and Christchurch on the 11th.

There was a cold spell between the 14th and 18th during which mean temperatures were 5° to 6°C below average. Frosts were recorded in many inland areas of Otago and Southland during this time.

Sunshine—Sunshine hours were above normal for most of the country apart from eastern areas of the North Island and Southland. Stations with greatest departures this month were: Tauranga Airport (-36 hrs) Gisborne Airport (-31 hrs) Invercargill Airport (-17 hrs) New Plymouth (+35 hrs) Westport (+29 hrs) and Timaru (+37 hrs).

THE WEATHER SEQUENCE, MARCH 1982

1st-7th March

A cold front associated with a depression off Westland crossed New Zealand on the 1st, bringing rain to most areas with heavy falls in some northern and western districts. This was followed by the passage of several fronts within a complex trough and rain remained widespread until the 3rd. Although this trough still covered the east of the North Island on the 4th, with rain continuing to fall in eastern and central areas of the North Island, an extensive anticyclone lying to the west brought cool, settled weather to the rest of the country. This anticyclone moved onto New Zealand over the next 3 days, developing centres to the east and west. Apart from showers in isolated areas the weather became generally fine and mild.

8th-14th March

Although it had moved eastward the anticyclone still covered the country on the 8th but by the 9th it was centred east of Chatham Island and there was a strong northwesterly flow onto the country, with rain in south-western areas. A cold front rapidly moved across the Tasman to lie across Fiordland and Southland on the 10th, became stationary during the 11th and slow moving on the 12th. Rain fell in western and southern areas between the 10th and 13th and there were some exceptionally heavy and prolonged falls in southern Westland and Fiordland.

There were light showers in some central districts as the front, now weak, moved across the country during the 13th and 14th, but the weather during these 2 days was generally fine and cool.

15th-21st March

On the 15th an anticyclone which had been lying in the Tasman Sea spread onto the country, with its centre lying close to Stewart Island. As this moved very slowly north-eastward it brought fine, cool weather, apart from isolated showers, to all districts until the 20th. By the 19th the anticyclone had weakened considerably and then formed part of an extensive belt of high pressure extending from west of Australia to east of New Zealand. A front within this pressure belt brought light rain to northern and central areas of the North Island on the 20th as it crossed the country, but otherwise the weather remained fine to the end of the week.

22nd-31st March

The belt of high pressure remained over New Zealand between the 21st and 23rd, with high pressure centres developing to the east and west of the country on the 22nd. The weather was generally fine but cool. On the 23rd a cold front, associated with a depression near Campbell Island, began to move up the east coast of the country, bringing rain to eastern and northern districts of the South Island and much of the North Island. A small depression developed behind this front, close to Taranaki, on the 24th and there were some heavy falls of rain from New Plymouth northward. The high pressure belt still lay across the country, bringing fine cool weather to all other districts until the 28th when a cold front, associated with a depression in the Tasman Sea, moved onto the South Island. Rain fell in southern and western areas on the 28th and 29th. A second front moved onto the country on the 30th bringing widespread and often heavy rain to most districts on the last 2 days of the month.

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J. S. HICKMAN, Director.