

NEW ZEALAND WEATHER DURING MARCH 1984

General—March was a very warm, cloudy and wet month in most parts of New Zealand. North-easterly winds were more frequent than usual over the whole country and south-westerlies were infrequent. Although winds were much lighter than usual in the south, there were more strong winds than usual in the north.

Hail and thunderstorms were rather more frequent than usual. A violent thunderstorm in the Te Anau - Dipton area of Southland on the 5th produced 100 mm of rain at Josephville (near Lumsden), causing considerable damage to roads and resulting in flooding in Te Anau and Lumsden. A thunderstorm at Auckland on the 10th caused localised flooding of shops and roads and resulted in about 23 motor accidents in the city. Hailstones, up to 45 mm across, damaged an estimated 90 percent of apple crops in the Riwaka - Motueka area on the 12th. A similar storm on the 13th, with stones the size of marbles, badly damaged apple crops in parts of Hawkes Bay. On the 31st a tornado struck the Tauranga suburb of Otumoetai causing serious damage to some homes.

Farmers throughout most of New Zealand reported excellent growth, but the humid and very wet conditions caused stock health problems in some areas.

Rainfall—Rainfalls were well above average over much of the country during March, with large areas of both islands receiving more than twice their normal March rainfall. New Plymouth had its highest ever March rainfall, while near-record rainfalls were recorded at Auckland, Dunedin and Paraparaumu. Some parts of Hawkes Bay, and central and south-western South Island areas, were quite dry however. Milford Sound recorded its driest March since 1967.

Temperature—The west coast of the South Island and Marlborough, along with much of the central North Island, was much warmer than usual during March, with temperatures between 1.5°C and 2°C above average. Hokitika had its warmest March on record. Over the remainder of the country temperatures were above average by between 0.5°C and 1°C.

Although overall temperatures for the month were above average, there was a long cool period between the 17th and 26th. On the 24th temperatures in many parts of New Zealand were 3°C to 5°C below average.

Sunshine—Parts of Northland, the Manawatu and Canterbury, had about average sunshine during March, but most of the country was very cloudy. Central North Island areas, along with parts of Marlborough and Otago were especially cloudy, with only about 70 percent of their usual sunshine. Both Taupo and Dunedin recorded their second-lowest ever March sunshine totals.

THE WEATHER SEQUENCE—MARCH 1984

1-7 March

A large anticyclone near the Chatham Islands, with a ridge over the North Island, gave fine, warm weather to most of the country on the 1st and 2nd. However, a slow moving cold front gave rain to south Westland and Fiordland, with some heavy falls on the 1st.

Meanwhile a large, and complex low was developing in the mid Tasman Sea and during the 3rd and 4th its associated cold front gave widespread rain as it moved over New Zealand. This front became slow moving over the North Island on the 5th giving further heavy rain in most North Island areas and on the west coast of the South Island, while the remainder of the South Island received scattered showers. However, there were some violent thunderstorms in Southland in the evening. During the 6th and 7th the low moved slowly across the South Island giving rain in most places, while the slow moving front produced further rain over much of the North Island.

8-14 March

The low and its associated front moved off to the east on the 8th with a clearance to fine, warm weather. However, another cold front moved quickly across the South Island during the 9th, giving some further heavy rain in western areas. The front moved on to the North Island on the 10th, giving some heavy rain, especially in the Bay of Plenty - East Cape area, and scattered showers elsewhere. While many parts of the country became cooler after the passage of the front, most eastern areas remained warm. The front moved away to the east on the 11th, but left a large shallow low over the country. As a result the weather remained unsettled, with showers in many places, from the 11th to the 14th.

15-21 March

The low moved slowly away to the east on the 15th and a cold front moved on to the South Island, bringing widespread rain to western areas and some light showers to places east of the Southern Alps. As the front moved on to the North Island during the 16th a complex low developed over central New Zealand and gave widespread rain. The rain eased to scattered showers as the low moved away to the east on the 17th and a cool southerly airstream spread over the country.

A large anticyclone spread eastwards over New Zealand during the 19th and the southerlies died away. The weather then became fine throughout the country although temperatures remained cool. On the 21st another cold front moved north-east over the South Island, accompanied by a brief freshening of the southerlies, and a few showers.

22-31 March

Another anticyclone spread on to the country behind the front and apart from fresh easterlies and a few showers over the northern half of the North Island, the weather was fine and cool from the 22nd to the 25th. The anticyclone moved off to the east during the 25th and 26th, allowing a cold front to move on to the South Island where it became slow moving. Moist northerlies ahead of the front brought heavy rain to areas west of the Alps on the 26th, 27th and 28th, before the front moved southwards off the country. Meanwhile a low was developing in the north Tasman Sea and this moved slowly south during the 29th, 30th and 31st. Warm north-easterlies on the eastern side of the low gave widespread rain over the country during this period.

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