Very Mild for the 2nd Successive Month

The weather patterns of January were broadly similar to December’s in that mild southwesterly winds were predominant with brief excursions into cooler northwesterly windflows. We started the month in a mild, dull, dry southerly with a high pressure area centred to the east. Atlantic rainbands moving eastwards during the afternoon and evening of 3rd brought a veer of wind to a more westerly direction. Ahead of further fronts on 5th it was windy but mild and even a shift of wind to the northwest on 6th brought only a small drop in temperature. Between 7th and 9th it was dull but mild but during 10th we were in a bright but slightly cool westerly. On 11th it was windy as an active cold front crossed the country and brought in a cool westerly for 12th. On 13th another active rainbelt moved eastwards and the period 13th to 15th was the windiest of the month but temperatures were well above normal. During 16th pressure rose after the passage of a weak cold front and as a high pressure area moved slowly eastwards near the south of Ireland winds decreased markedly and some inland areas had air frost between 17th and 19th. Daytime temperatures on 19th and 20th were high as southwesterly winds increased but a veer of wind to northwesterly on 21st brought a drop to normal values. A ridge of high pressure moving eastwards early on 22nd allowed air frost to develop widely but thereafter it was mild and fairly breezy with southerly or southwesterly until 28th when there was a bright westerly; this quickly backed southwesterly as a high pressure area to the south became the dominant feature as it moved eastwards.

Record Temperatures:
Mean maximum, mean minimum and mean air temperatures were well above normal-by 2°C to 3°C at most stations and broke existing records at many stations whose period of record is more than 30 years. At Malin Head, where records are available since 1885, the mean temperature of 5.4°C exceeded the previous record, set in 1944, by a startling 1°C. However at Birr, Roche’s Point and Cahirciveen (Valentia Observatory) January 1944 was milder. Individual daily values were less remarkable but Claremorris (13.1°C) had its highest January temperature since 1958. Highest temperatures of the month were recorded on 5th or on 27th at most stations and it was on 27th that Shannon Airport recorded 13.9°C and Malin Head 13.8°C. Only on 10th when Clones had a maximum of only 5.2°C (long-term average 6.5°C) were daytime temperatures below normal; maxima were about normal on 10th, 17th and 21st and otherwise were above normal especially between 1st and 3rd, on 5th, 7th to 9th, 13th to 16th, 18th to 20th, 22nd to 27th and 29th to 31st.

Some airfrost did occur on 10th, 13th, between 17th and 19th and also on 22nd; indeed Kilkenny had three consecutive nights with air frost between 17th and 19th and the lowest temperature of the month, -4.0°C was recorded there on 18th as well as -3.6°C on 22nd. At the Phoenix Park the frosty nights were sufficient to depress the mild minimum temperature to 3.5°C compared with 4.2°C in 1944 and while the mean maximum in 1989 at 10.4°C was 0.3°C higher than in 1944, the overall mean was 7.0°C compared with 7.2°C in 1944. Dublin Airport escaped lightly on the frosty nights and exceeded the 1944 mean maximum and minimum by 0.4°C or more. On such differences temperature records stand or fall.
The night of the big wind
(January 6th/7th 1839)

One hundred and fifty years ago on January the 6th/7th Ireland had one of its most infamous wind storms. It has become known as 'the night of the big wind'. There are many accounts of the storm and though many are more meteorologically factual, few are as colourful as the one that follows. It was written by a surveyor antiquarian and Gaelic scholar named John O'Donovan who was engaged in a research and mapping survey in west Wicklow. His colleague was a 'herculean young Kerryman', Mr. O'Connor - a hardy mountaineer. They had to cross the mountain to work in Glendalough. Below is the letter written after the night of the big wind. Although surrounded on all sides by steep mountains Glendalough was hit hard much to the discomfort of O'Donovan and O'Connor.

From John O'Donovan, Surveyor
Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow
January 8, 1839

To T. A. Larcom, Esq., R. Engineer

Dear Sir,

Since last I wrote we have suffered much in the Mountains lying between this and Blessington. No car could be brought across the mountains in this season, and we must make our way back to Blessington through Dublin, which is the cheapest and most expeditious mode of travelling, as it is impracticable to walk the distance. I shall here give a short account of our proceedings:

We left Baltinglass on Friday and travelled by car to Blessington, expecting to be able to get a car thence to Glendalough; but the Hotel Keeper would not send a car thither at the usual price per mile, and I was not willing to give him more. So, on the morning which preceded to produce a fine hard day, we set out for Glendalough on foot across the mountains, thinking nothing of the distance, which is only 16 miles around the road.

We came on in very good humour for seven miles, stopping on the way to look at old churches, but when we reached the side of what they call the Cross Mountains, the day suddenly changed its aspect; the snow fell in torrent-like heavy sheets (deep), and before we reached the top of the mountains we found ourselves in the middle of a snowstorm. I stopped short and paused to consider what was best to do. The clouds closed round us, and the wind blew in a most furious manner. Here we met a countryman, who told us that the distance to Glendalough was nine miles, that the road for six miles was uninhabited, and that the last road had swept away two of the bridges. I got a good deal alarmed at finding ourselves a mile and a half into the mountain, and no appearance of a cessation of the snowstorm. I told O'Connor who was determined to go on, that I would return, that I did not wish to show away life to no purpose. I returned (contrary). The whole side of the mountain looked like a sheet of paper horribly beautiful but the wind was now directly in our face. We returned 3 miles to Charlev C.'s publichouse, where we got refreshingly bad treatment.

The next morning I felt very feverish from having slept in a damp bed in a horribly cold room, but seeing that the snow began to thaw and it being Sunday, I resolved to go to the Churches (Glendalough). So we set out across the same mountain in which we had been stopped by the snow. I never felt so tired. Striking with the half disintegrated masses of snow, and occasionally down to the knees in the ruts in the road, which proved exceedingly treacherous as being covered with the snow. One of my shoes gave way and I was afraid that I should be obliged to walk barefooted. We moved on... dipped into the mountain, and when we had travelled about 4 miles, we met a curious old man of the name of Tom Byrne, who came along with us. We were now within five miles of the Glen, but a misty rain, truly appalling, dashed constantly in our faces until we arrived at St. Kevin's Shrine. Horribly beautiful and truly romantic, but not sublime.

Fortunately for us there is now a good, but most unreasonably expensive Hotel in the Glen, and when I entered I procured a pair of wooden stockings and knee breeches, and went at once to look at the churches, which gave me a deal of satisfaction. (I looked like a mad man!)

We got a very bad dinner and went to bed at half past twelve. I could not sleep, but thinking of what we had to do, and dreading a fall of snow which might detain us in the mountains, O'Connor fell asleep at once.

At one o'clock a most tremendous hurricane commenced which rocked the house beneath us as if it were a ship. Rooffully stricken but I was much in dread that the roof would be blown off the house. I attempted to wake O'Connor by shaking him, but could not. About 2 o'clock the storm became so furious, that I determined to make my way out; but I was no sooner out of bed that the window was dashed in upon the floor and after it a spavine mightly as a thunderbolt. I then, seeing that the roof would be blown off at once, pushed out the shutter and closed it as soon as the direct spavine had passed over, and placed myself diagonally against it to prevent the next spavine from getting at the roof inside; but the next blast that came completely out of my position and forced in the shutter! This spavine O'Connor, who was kept asleep if by a hailstone charm. I closed the shutter again despite the wind, and kept it closed for an hour, when I was as cold as ice (being naked all the time).

O'Connor went to dram the people of the house, but he could find none of them, they having been away entering their castle in the cattles which were much weakened by the Hurricane. The man of the house at last camp up and around the building by fixing a heavy form against it. I then dressed myself and sat at the kitchen fire till morning. Pity I have not paper to tell the rest.

A tree in the Church Yard was prosecuted and many cabins in the Glen much injured. The bole of the Upper Lake was smashed to pieces. The old people assert that this was the greatest storm that raged in the Glen for more than seventy years.

We go to Dublin to-night by the coach which passes here at 1 o'clock. O'Connor returns to Blessington to finish the Barony of Lower Talbots town, and I shall call in St. Patri's. I will write next from Dublin.

Your obedient servant

John O'Donovan
### Meteorological Summary

#### Rainfall

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<th>Most in a Day</th>
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**Notes:** Rainfall in millimetres. Temperatures in Degrees Celsius, Sunshine in Hours and Wind in Knots. Gale Gust = Gust of > 33.5 knots. * = Days with 0.2mm or more
(continued from front page)

Even though it had 6 nights with airfrost Kilkenny’s mean minimum was 2.4°C above normal and at some stations minima were more than 3.0°C above normal. This was because of very mild nights between 1st and 3rd, 6th and 8th, 15th, 20th, 23rd to 25th, 30th and 31st.

Rainfall (marked variation west to east)
Amounts varied between 185mm at Cahirciveen and 28mm at Dublin airport while percentage totals ranged from 120% of normal near the west coast to less than 80% of normal in the midlands and less than 60% of normal in the east.

Wettest spells occurred during 4th-5th, on 11th, 13th, 20th, 24th-25th and 27th. With the rainbelts moving in from the Atlantic in a generally southerly airflow, they were at their most active near west facing coasts and had often weakened considerably by the time they reached the east coast. Cahirciveen (Valentia Observatory) had nine days with 12.7 mm (0.5 inch) or more, four of them occurring in succession between 24th and 27th, while Dublin Airports highest daily total was less than 7 mm. Highest daily total was 30.9 mm at Claremorris on 11th and on both 11th and 27th a number of western and southwestern stations had more than 20mm of rain. Driest spells were 1st-2nd, 6th-7th, 15th-19th, 23rd and 28th-31st; in the east some of these spells were considerably extended as is evidenced by only 9 days with more than 1 mm of rain at Dublin Airport compared with 19 at Belmullet.

Hail
Hail showers occurred widely on 4th and 12th. Thunder was reported near the west and southwestern coasts on 3rd and 4th and near the north and west coasts at times between 11th and 14th.

Sunshine
Sunshine exhibited the opposite gradient to rainfall with totals ranging from 76 hours (138% of normal) at Casement Aerodrome to less than 27 hours (53% of normal) at Claremorris. Highest totals were recorded on 4th, 10th, 12th, 17th, 21st, 26th and 28th while 1st to 3rd, 5th to 8th, 11th, 13th-16th, 20th, 24th-25th, 27th-30th were dull.

Because of the predominance of southwesterly winds the number of days with no sun ranged from 15 at Claremorris to 7 at Casement Aerodrome which had its sunniest January for 10 years while in parts of the west and southwest it was the dullest January for 5 to 8 years.

Wind
Windiest spells were 3rd to 5th, 10th-11th, 13th to 15th, and 20th to 27th, especially 26th-27th. Highest gusts were recorded at northern and west coastal stations where gusts of just over 60 knots were recorded on 11th, gusts of about 70 knots on both 13th and 14th and of 55 to 60 knots on 26th-27th. Elsewhere highest gusts were in the range 43 to 60 knots with 63 knots recorded at Casement Aerodrome on 13th.

The storm on the night of 6th-7th January 1939 probably caused more widespread damage in Ireland than any storm in recent centuries. This night has become legendary as "The Night of the Big Wind". Pressure had fallen rapidly in the west of Ireland on the morning of 6th. Rain and strong winds which built up to hurricane force spread eastwards over the country. Winds reached gale force on the east coast by 2100 GMT. The gale continued till the evening of 7th. The register of observations taken at Dublin (Phoenix Park) records gale force winds from 2100 GMT on 6th January to 1800 GMT on 7th January inclusive.

The 0900 GMT observation on 7th January is worth giving in full: "Pressure 28.721 inches (972.6 hPa), Temperature 40°F (4.4°C). Rainfall for past 24 hours 0.115 inches; clear, and blowing a gale. A hurricane from about two to four in the morning. Upwards of 160 trees along the pathway in the park from Dublin Gate to Mountjoy torn up". It was estimated that over 2,500 valuable trees were blown down in the Dublin area and some 5,000 houses (20% to 25% of total) had damage ranging from complete destruction to broken windows (Pettigrew and Dalton Almanack 1846).

Reports from other parts of Ireland and Great Britain show comparable damage in places as widely separated as Cappoquin, Limerick, Galway, Athlone, Derry, Newry, Wales (Menai Bridge) and places in the south of Scotland and the north of England. Newspaper reports indicate that the storm was particularly severe in Liverpool where several vessels were destroyed and a number of lives lost. It is reasonable to assume that wind speed exceeded 52 m/s (100 kt) in gusts in many parts of Ireland during that storm.

Included in the bulletin is an account of the night written by one John O'Donovan who was working in Glendalough at the time.