Met Society Newsletter

DECEMBER WEATHER CLIPPINGS

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Sun, glorious sun - and rain to come

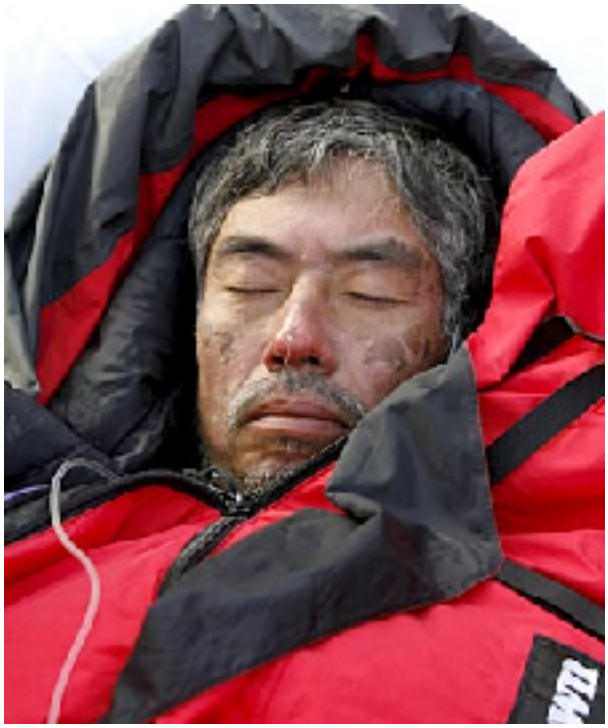
Monday Dec 01, 2008 By Vaimoana Tapaleao NZ Herald

Casey Ramritu (9) relaxes in the sun on the Old Mangere Bridge as he joined other kids on Sunday for the Carters Kids gone fishin day. Photo / AP

The weekend's glorious run of sunshine and warm temperatures throughout the country will be gone this week.
Rain will welcome Aucklanders back to work today, with a temperature of 20C predicted - slightly lower than the scorching maximum of 26C in the city yesterday.
MetService weather forecaster Ian Gall said most places throughout the country had had warm temperatures during the weekend, with the hottest place being Kawerau, which reached 28C.
Other places with some of the warmest temperatures included the Manawatu-Horowhenua area, which fetched up to 26C, and Thames and the Waikato-Waitomo area registering around 27C.
Wellington is expected to be slightly warmer today, with a temperature of 19C , while Christchurch can expect 17C.

Rescued climber in 'remarkable' condition

By BECK ELEVEN at Mount Cook Village - The Press /Waikato Times | 05 December 2008



SURVIVOR: Hideaki Nara is brought to Christchurch by Westpac Rescue Helicopter after his mountain ordeal.

The climber rescued from Mt Cook/Aoraki this morning after a week-long ordeal which claimed the life of his guide is in "remarkable" condition, Christchurch Hospital staff say.

Hideaka Nara, 51, was airlifted to hospital this morning suffering frostbite, but his climbing companion Kiyoshi Ikenouchi, 49, perished overnight, just hours before the rescue helicopter arrived.

The pair endured seven days at 3700m on the country's highest peak in ferocious weather conditions which prevented earlier rescue attempts.

Despite suffering frostbite to his hands and face, Nara was able to walk to the helicopter.

Ikenouchi and Nara are understood to have lost their tent yesterday and may have lost a sleeping bag as well, leaving only one between them. The men spent last night in the open as their tent either became buried in snow or blew away, Police Inspector Dave Gaskin said. Supplies were dropped near their camp yesterday, but Gaskin said rescuers confirmed this morning the pair did not know they were there. But it may not have made much of a difference in the end, as the pair were already very well equipped, he said.

Mr Ikenouchi - who helped in a rescue on the mountain five years ago - is the 69th climber known to have died on New Zealand's highest peak, and the seventh Japanese.

The pair were attempting Mt Cook's Grand Traverse, climbing from the Hooker Valley to the South Peak, summiting from there, before heading down to Plateau Hut.

Little relief likely in forecast rain

By PAUL GORMAN - The Press | Tuesday, 09 December 2008

STACY SQUIRES/The Press

DUSTY: Geoffrey Wilson's farm near Methven is drying up already - predicted rain is unlikely to do more than whet the appetite of farmers in Canterbury.

Predicted rain today is unlikely to do more than whet the appetite of farmers and briefly slow the brown tinge advancing across Canterbury.

Forecasters expect parts of the region to receive close to 10mm of rain by this evening. While that will help, it is not enough to turn the situation around.

During the past three months North Canterbury, the foothills and some inland basins of South Canterbury have had less than 20mm of rain.

The looming drought has been heightened by high temperatures and warm north to north-west winds sucking moisture from the ground.

Methven farmer Geoffrey Wilson said the early dry spell had made farming difficult.

"It's tricky to be dry in December because you are trying to save feed and build reserves up." Despite the dry conditions, it was not a drought, Wilson said.

"I would call it dry but I wouldn't call it a drought. The last couple of months have been warm and windy. It has not affected crops much at all but if we don't get any rain within the next couple of weeks it will start affecting our crops. It has put a bit of pressure on the livestock side of it. Growth in the grass paddocks has been quite slow."

MetService spokesman Bob McDavitt said the speed that moisture evaporated at this time of the year with about 5mm lost a day was a big concern.

Central and Mid-Canterbury were likely to get the most rain today, with between 5mm and 10mm, but North and South Canterbury might receive only a couple of millimetres.

Blue Skies Weather director Tony Trewinnard said inland South Canterbury had been driest for longest, since September. However, North Canterbury had dried out faster during the past few weeks than any other part of the region.

Rain today would at least stop farmers getting further behind with soil-moisture deficit.

"While that buys a bit of relief in terms of getting growth, it probably won't change significantly the dry pattern. It will help and will postpone things for another week, and that's good."

A look back at New Zealand's year of weather extremes

Tue, 16 Dec 2008 2:49p.m. TV3

A summer credited as the eighth warmest in 100 years had people wondering when the golden days would fade and the wintry cold would return.

Rainfall was below normal over much of the North Island and lower South Island, and the Waikato received less than half the normal level, the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric research (Niwa) reported.

Farmers fought the effects of a summer-autumn drought, as a La Nina weather pattern spread dry conditions across the country.

However, an abrupt end to those conditions arrived in mid-April, when a deluge swept over the North Island, claiming eight lives and wreaking havoc.

Despite MetService warnings to be wary of streams and rivers rising quickly, a group from Auckland's Elim Christian College were caught out canyoning down the Mangatepopo River in Tongariro National Park on April 15.

Teacher Tony McClean, 29, and 16-year-old students Tom Hsu, Natasha Bray, Anthony Mulder, Tara Gregory, Floyd Fernandes and Portia McPhail, died when a torrent of water created a flash flood in the gorge.

All had been at the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre of New Zealand on a course.

Earlier in that day, another person died in a Northland lighting storm . Roger McGill, 61, was struck by a bolt of lightning while sitting on his horse. Both were killed instantly.

Northland Hunt spokeswoman Donna Austin said there had been several bolts of lightning and Mr McGill appeared to have been struck by the final one.

"It was the most bizarre weather patterns, forked lightning, the lot -- and that is when the gentleman was struck and killed and so was his horse."

Amid the mayhem much-needed rain hit the parched Waikato, arriving in quantities much greater than locals wanted.

Rainfall that came close to breaking records in many parts of the country continued into July, and stormy conditions were blamed for the deaths of three men at sea.

Rotorua canoeist James Moore, 33, drowned when he capsized off the Mt Maunganui coast in large swells on July 26.

Further east at Opotiki, Rick Josephs, 38, and Damien Wyatt, 35, died the following day, when their fishing boat grounded in heavy seas.

Two storms hit in quick succession at the end of July and beginning of August, the first of which claimed the lives of a Northland couple.

Kerry Witt and Lavona Cherrington were swept away as they tried to cross a ford in the Bay of Islands.

Then August storms created further devastation, with Marlborough declaring a state of emergency as it was hit by severe flooding.

East Coast, Bay of Plenty and parts of Upper Hutt also suffered from flood damage, while gale-force winds caused major disruptions in Hawke's Bay, Horowhenua, Nelson, and on the West Coast.

Tornadoes struck both the West Coast and Bay of Plenty, lifting off roofing iron and tearing down trees.

On Auckland's North Shore, 14 houses were evacuated after heavy rain caused a massive slip.

In the wash-up, the Insurance Council estimated the damage from the August storms to be in excess of $50 million, and still it wasn't over.

Rapid rainfall caused further loss of life in October, when a vigorous storm lashed Taranaki and Canterbury.

Dunedin ecologist Diane May Campbell-Hunt, was tramping on Mount Taranaki when the weather hit on October 7. She died when she was swept away while trying to cross a stream.

Intense rain had flooded streams on the mountain, Sergeant Andrew Ross said.

"Those streams are little more than a trickle normally but heavy rainfall can turn them into a raging torrent. An hour later they can be back to normal," Mr Ross said.

In late November, search and rescue workers began efforts to rescue two Japanese climbers trapped on Aoraki/Mt Cook's summit.
For nearly a week, high winds prevented rescuers from being able to reach the men, 3700m up the country's tallest mountain.
On December 5, a helicopter was at last able to lift Hideaki Nara, 51, off the summit.
When the chopper returned for his companion, the would-be rescuers were crushed to di scover guide Kiyoshi Ikenouchi, 41, had died hours earlier.
Bleak as the news was elsewhere, snow being dumped on to mountains meant ski fields reported their best year ever.
Ski Areas Association spokesman Miles Davidson said snow conditions had been fantastic on all fields and its members had sold 1,402,000 passes, 116,000 more than last year, and 1000 more than the previous record in 2006.
As fast as the cold weather came, the rain seemed to dry up and once again experts began talking about summer droughts after a mild spring.
Farmers and other growers on the East Coast of the North Island had early concerns, with Niwa spring weather data showing less than half the normal rainfall in parts of Gisborne and Hawke's Bay.
Farmers aside, most of the country was likely to be pleased by the mild start to summer, with Niwa predicting warm and settled weather across the country.
NZPA

Wakatipu likely wetter and warmer

By Jude Gillies on Wed, 17 Dec 2008 Otago Daily Times

The Wakatipu area is more likely than not to get warmer and wetter weather than usual this summer. Photo by Jude Gillies.

This week's rain is not unexpected, because December was still the start of summer and the weather typically remained unsettled until after Christmas, Wellington MetService forecaster Kathleen Kozyniak said.
National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (Niwa) climate scientist Dr Andrew Tait said, based on the Niwa seasonal outlook for December to February, Wakatipu had a "slightly above average" chance of having a warmer and wetter summer than usual.
Rather than making a prediction, Niwa gave the "likelihood" of eventualities, he said.
He likened the chance of a warm, wet summer this year to that of spinning a chocolate wheel divided into three wedges, where there was a 40% chance of the temperatures being average and a 40% chance of them being above average and just a 20 % chance of it being cooler.
It was the same for rainfall in Wakatipu, which was most likely to be the usual or higher this summer, he said. "But there's still a chance of it being less, but less of a chance," he added. "
Meanwhile, the eastern side of the South Island, in the rain shadow area, could expect a greater likelihood of warmer, drier weather.
The unsettled weather was all due to the prevailing westerly air flow over the country bringing rain to the west side of the South Island and drier conditions in the east, Dr Tait said. The Niwa outlook would be updated in January, he added.

Hot year is beyond reasonable drought

Dec 18, 2008 By Eloise Gibson Herald

A farmer in South Australia hand-feeds his cattle after a heatwave brought 15 consecutive days above 35C. Photo / AP

The world has been sweltering in what is thought to be the 10th hottest year on record - one in which Arctic sea ice shrank and the hole in the ozone layer stayed stubbornly large.
Data released by the World Meteorological Organisation yesterday showed the globe was 0.31 degrees celsius hotter than the 1961-1990 average of 14C.
And New Zealand kept pace with the world's warming - preliminary results show the average temperature here was about 0.3C hotter in 2008 than the average for the past three decades.
The WMO - which collects climate data from around the world - said 2008 was cooler than other years in the 21st century because of a La Nina weather pattern.
But it was warm for a La Nina year, and was likely to be the 10th hottest year since records began in 1850.
While New Zealanders grumbled about the quick onset of winter, other parts of the globe suffered extreme cold, devastating floods, sizzling heatwaves and prolonged droughts.
In January, parts of Turkey shivered through their coldest nights in almost 50 years - part of a cold wave that killed hundreds of people in Afghanistan and China.
In March, a record heatwave in southern Australia brought Adelaide its longest-running hot spell - 15 consecutive days with maximum temperatures above 35C.

A very warm northern summer shrank Arctic sea ice to its second-smallest area, and smallest volume since satellite measurements began in 1979.
The ozone hole grew to its second-biggest size this year - and CO2 levels in the atmosphere kept rising rapidly.
Arctic sea ice shrank to its smallest surface area of 4.3 million km in 2007. However, because the ice was thinner this year, the volume of ice was less in 2008 than in any other year.
Niwa climate scientist James Renwick said the sea ice was melting more quickly than scientists had expected, meaning global warming might accelerate beyond UN forecasts. Ice deflects the sun's heat better than water, so melting Arctic ice could speed the pace of global warming. Mr Renwick said the ice could melt completely within a decade.
WMO said the growth rate of CO2 in the atmosphere - thought to be the biggest culprit behind the warming- had increased about 2 parts per million every year since 2000.
There is evidence oceans are absorbing less CO2 than they used to, meaning countries might have to make bigger cuts in CO2 emissions to get the same result.

Forecast: fine - or otherwise

Saturday Dec 20, 2008 By Chris Barton Weekend Herald

MetService Weather Ambassador Bob McDavitt at MetService's Westhaven base. Photo / Martin Sykes

Weather ambassador?
"Oh well, yes, I act as a go-between for the weather and its users. I can't communicate very well with the weather, but I can communicate with the users of the weather."
Weather users? "The main thing is to make sure people who are using the weather forecasts are aware they are forecasts - that they come from isobar land."
Isobar land? "People live in the real world. We don't. We live in the world of models - so once you have a concept of isobar land you won't have any gripe with forecasters." Right. But why is it so many do? To answer these and other questions, such as what's in store weather-wise this summer, the Herald asked three weather forecasters about how they look into the future. Be warned, isobar land can be a strange and shifting landscape.
What is the outlook for this summer?
Niwa, our National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, says above-average temperatures and near normal rainfalls are the most likely outcome across most of the country. The west of the South Island may be a little wetter and there's likely to be less rain than normal in the east. Soils are drier than normal in many eastern regions at the moment and eastern regions could well stay drier than normal over summer.
That only makes sense if you know what normal is - what is it?
Principal Scientist for Climate Variability and Change at Niwa, Dr James Renwick, says "normal conditions" for climate scientists have a very specific meaning - close to the average over the past 30 years of the climate in a particular place.
In the greater Auckland city region, for example, total rainfall averages around 230mm in summer. Rainfalls within about 20 per cent either side of that are in the normal range. Average summer daytime maximum temperatures are around 23C and overnight lows

about 15C. Temperature within about 0.3 degrees of the average are in the normal range. Last summer, for example, Auckland's mean temperature of 19.9C was above normal, at plus 0.7C. In Christchurch summer rainfall of 130mm or so, and temperatures of between 12C and 22C are typical. Last summer Christchurch's mean of 16.9C was plus 0.3C making it just above average. Rainfall of 188mm however, was 144 per cent of normal - well above normal.

So in Auckland, for example, we can expect it to be warm like last summer, but unlike last summer which was quite dry, it's going to be normal rainfall, which means quite wet - right?

"When we say temperatures are likely to be above normal, what that means is likely," says Renwick. "You cannot make a categorical seasonal forecast because of all the chaotic effects. You can say things are tending in a certain direction, but you can never rule out rogue events - things diverging from the average picture predicted by the computer models." Weather ambassador McDavitt is more succinct: "A forecast is a forecast is a forecast - end of argument.

What then, can you predict?

"A fair fraction of the variation in the climate is unpredictable because of chaos effects, so you can't predict the day-to-day sequence of the weather more than a week or ten days in advance," says Renwick.

"So you have to approach the whole thing probablistically. When computer models with all the physics in them are run, they are run many times from slightly different starting conditions. You just tweak the inputs - employing the whole idea of chaos theory, then average to smooth out the chaotic part."

What does chaos theory have to do with it?

Renwick is talking about "the butterfly effect" - the idea that some physical processes such as the weather or the climate system are very sensitive to subtle changes. Blame Edward Lorenz, who, in 1961, had created an early computer program to simulate weather. One day he changed one of a dozen numbers representing atmospheric conditions, from 0.506127 to 0.506. The tiny alteration utterly transformed his long-term forecast, a point Lorenz amplified in his 1972 paper, Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set off a Tornado in Texas?

"Tiny little changes in the state of the weather now can lead to huge differences to what the weather does in three or four days," says Renwick.

"The chaos is caused by everyday life - the hubbub of background change," says McDavitt. "Two cars passing each other on the motorway create a little whirlwind of air - a mini vortex. Most of the time it just fades away as noise does. But sometimes the atmosphere is in feedback mode. It will take any small thing and feed on it and create something bigger. You only need to light up a cigarette or close a door and you've jiggled the pattern - you've taken it on a new path."

So you can light a fag and change the weather. Do forecasters really believe this stuff?

Claiming a butterfly's wings can cause a storm, is another way of saying we simply don't know what caused the storm. Nor can we possibly know all the slight connections between small events and big effects. But forecasters do incorporate the notion of chaos effects into their computer modelling.

A number of forecasting centres around the world run dynamical climate models - essentially a big computer crunching measures of circulation of the atmosphere and the oceans, winds, temperature and rainfall - collected in real time. Using laws of physics, the models are run forward again and again with tiny changes to the starting conditions - such as changing a temperature input by a quarter of a degree. Little by little a consensus about likely outcomes is built.

The other approach is to use statistical relationships and correlations between what the oceans and atmosphere are now and and how they have behaved in other years. While it sounds as though the dynamic models - using all the correct physics - should be more

accurate, Renwick says sometimes for seasonal outlooks, statistical forecasts do just as well. Why? Because of chaos theory and the inherent unpredictability of weather.

Which is why, I guess, that forecasters get it wrong sometimes?

"By far the majority of the time the MetService gets it right," says Public Weather Services manager Peter Kreft. "Certainly often enough to make a valuable contribution to the safety of life and property in New Zealand landmass."

To get the weather forecast right, forecasters first have to predict the future state of the atmosphere - where the highs and lows will be tomorrow or the next day, their shape and intensity, and how fast, and in what direction, they will move. "Weather modelling is quite good, but not perfect, at answering these sorts of questions," says Kreft.

But having the atmosphere sorted still doesn't guarantee that the forecast will be accurate. As Kreft points out, people don't really care about the future state of the atmosphere, they want to know what the weather is going to be like at their place.

Which is where it gets tricky - because there are so many variables including New Zealand's varied geography. In certain air streams, for example, a 5-10 degree change in direction may be enough to turn showers/cloud/etc on or off. Or a front may move a little faster than predicted, so that rain forecast for tomorrow morning may fall in the night hours before dawn. Or there may be a situation where all the ingredients for thunderstorms are present, but there is no "push" to get them started. Without a trigger nothing, not even a teeny bit of cloud, may develop.

What happens when severe weather warnings don't happen?MetService measures its success in severe weather warnings with two ratios - Probability of Detection (POD) and False Alarm Ratio (FAR). Such warnings are issued for events expected to occur over an area of 1000 square kilometres or more - which at about 32km by 32km square isn't that big.

The POD for heavy rain in 2008 was 95 per cent. Translation: of all the heavy rainfall events of 1000 square kilometres or more which occurred, 95 per cent of them were correctly forecast and the remaining 5 per cent were not forecast. The FAR for heavy rain in 2008 was 27 per cent. Translation: of all the heavy rainfall events of 1000 square kilometres or more which were forecast, 27 per cent of those forecasts were incorrect.

But as Kreft points out, such "cry wolf" measures are based on strict criteria. "The commonest cause of false alarms for heavy rainfall, for example, is insufficient quantity (maybe 75mm instead of 150mm), not no rain."

But severe weather warnings do sometimes cause problems. In October Far North Mayor Wayne Brown demanded an apology from MetService for a weather forecast he claims drove Labour Weekend visitors away and cost the region dearly. Kreft says the Thursday evening before Labour Weekend MetService put out a minimal severe weather warning for eastern parts of northland for Friday only. "It didn't rain as much as we expected and the whole thing was over on the Friday - there was never at any time a warning that was issued that was applicable to Labour Weekend."

What are the oceans and atmosphere telling us right now?

"It's neutral," says Renwick. "The oceans aren't doing anything in the tropical Pacific. Sea temperatures are close to their long-term average." These are measured all over the world by satellites and other sensors including Argo, a global array of more than 3000 free-drifting profiling floats. "The ocean holds hugely more heat than the atmosphere and evolves more slowly - that's where most of the memory of the climate system resides."

But though the oceans are remembering to be normal, the atmosphere is not. The Southern Oscillation Index (SOI), calculated from the monthly or seasonal fluctuations in the air pressure difference between Tahiti and Darwin, is reading +1.

That means strong Pacific trade winds - which is what happens in La Nina conditions when there is extensive cooling of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean. The opposite, El Nino, is when there's extensive warming of the central and eastern Pacific and a negative SOI.

Both these weather patterns, which start in the tropics and ripple out to the higher latitudes, have a profound effect on what weather we get in New Zealand. But this year, we have neither La Nina nor El Nino. We have an ocean that isn't warming up or cooling down and an atmosphere above +1. At the moment, things are out of synch.

"The atmosphere is still thinking there is a La Nina going on - the trade winds are still stronger than normal," says Renwick. "It's quite unusual for there to be something happening in the atmosphere and not something happening in the ocean - we're not in a textbook situation."

This is because El Nino and La Nina cycles are what are known as coupled oscillations - the ocean and atmosphere talk to each other. "The reason the sea temperatures change is because the trade winds change, and the trade winds change because the sea temperatures change - it's a chicken and egg thing."

So what's it going to be - neutral or weak La Nina conditions?"Officially everybody is saying we're in a neutral state, because the ocean is neutral or near its long-term average," says Renwick. "But we are aware the atmosphere isn't quite playing the game. The indication is the situation in the atmosphere will ease back to neutral over the summer."

Because the situation is unusual Renwick says there is more reliance on dynamic rather than statistical models. "There is a chance the atmospheric circulation difference from normal will actually convince the oceans to play along and the ocean will actually start to cool in the Eastern Pacific." But only a handful of the models are suggesting the oceans might cool. Most say the wannabe La Nina atmosphere is going to fizzle out to neutral.

What sort of summer do we get with neutral conditions?

Bob McDavitt suggests we're in for a summer of jazz. It's a complicated musical analogy. When La Nina is to the fore in the orchestra of weather, it's all slower tunes and stringed instruments, apparently the sound of the hot dry anticyclones of last summer. When El Nino is in charge, expect strident marching sounds from the brass section - just like the noise that cold outbreak in mid-November made when it brought snow and hail to the country. But with neither La Nina nor El Nino you get, well..., "weather jazz" - with each instrument in succession playing a solo piece. In other words, a mixed bag. It sounds frustrating. "It's not - jazz is quite good. It's very satisfying - everyone gets their own due," says McDavitt. "If you take 10 days off for your holiday I can pretty well guarantee 50 per cent of it will be affected by easterly type conditions and 50 per cent by westerlies." With not as many hot, dry days, farmers should be happier, not to mention the rural fire authority.

Neutral conditions also provide more latitude for the path anticyclones track across New Zealand - a zone moulded by the subtropic ridge which divides the trade winds to the north from the Roaring 40s to the south. Watch out, says McDavitt, for any weather map that shows an anticyclone over the Chatham Islands and a low pressure system to the north - a recipe in northeastern districts for a period of vigorous easterly winds with driving rain. "It's the sort of thing we will issue heavy rain warnings for, but it's not something you need to cancel your holiday plans on, or even change your holiday plans, because it is only going to last 24-48 hours."

If short bursts of heavy rain are on the menu - the kind of rain that will cause temporary evacuation of some camping grounds - what else can weather users do to see it coming?

"Radar allows you to see things you cannot see any other way, and therefore allows you to forecast things you previously couldn't forecast," says Kreft. "The ideal would be to have all of New Zealand within about 180km of weather radar."

Radar is the secret weapon in the arsenal of the Meteorological Service. There are now five around the country - the newest at New Plymouth - and four more planned over the next few years. What radar sees is gathering precipitation on the edge of the horizon. And, from the echo it receives, whether it's rain, hail or snow, its intensity and how fast

it's moving. "It equips us so much better to observe, and then forecast small-scale weather phenomena, particularly those that are severe," says Kreft.

The only problem with radar is that the warnings it can give are only a few hours in advance. At the moment the MetService provides a severe weather warning service for broad-scale weather that covers all of New Zealand. By the middle of next year it plans to have severe thunderstorm warnings - sent out to emergency managers by cellphone or pager - for those areas which are within radar coverage. Meanwhile, weather users can check Severe Thunderstorm Outlook and Watch online (www.metservice.com). And, if they're in range, for the latest sweep of the radar.

What about tropical cyclones - more or fewer in neutral conditions?

"Our records going back 40 years show the El Nino/La Nina cycle does affect whereabouts tropical cyclones form and how many you tend to have in a given season," says Renwick.

"To affect New Zealand, one has to come out of the tropics in the right place and go through an ex-tropical transition - so it has to become like a regular storm that would cross the country. It's quite a rare event and relatively unpredictable."

According to the statistics, in the long term average, in four out of five summers, one tropical cyclone comes out of the tropics and gets close enough to New Zealand to be an issue.

McDavitt notes that 12 years out of the past 40 years of records were neutral years. And comparing the three types of conditions - El Nino, La Nina and Neutral - the greatest likelihood of cyclone coming towards New Zealand is in the neutral bracket. "The probability of a cyclone moving out of the tropics and affecting New Zealand this coming summer is slightly above normal."

McDavitt makes the observation, too, that it was in previous neutral years that we got the big ones - cyclone Giselle which coincided with the Wahine disaster in April 1968; and cyclone Bola which struck Hawke's Bay and Gisborne/East Cape in March 1988.

Coincidence? Maybe.

But perhaps, with cyclone season starting in January, and a butterfly flapping its wings in say Fiji, our jazzy summer could strike up a very strident tune.

Traffic builds up as holidays loom

6:19PM Wednesday December 24, 2008

Roads around the country have been busy as people rushed to do last-minute shopping and holiday goers made their way to their Christmas destinations.

Police dealt with many minor crashes as well as attending a fatal Christmas Eve collision in rural Waikato where one person died after two cars collided at Whakamaru.

Police are warning about slippery roads and flooding around New Zealand after heavy rain overnight Tuesday. In Wellington, police warned that rain had made roads very slippery, especially on the windy Rimutaka Hill Road.

There has been some flooding in the Karangahake Gorge, between Paeroa and Waihi, with one lane closed.

And wet weather is being blamed for a truck jack-knifing on the Auckland harbour bridge. It smashed into the median barrier and closed the southbound centre lanes for more than four hours. (abridged)

Sun set to stick around till New Year

The Dominion Post | Friday, 26 December 2008

ROSS GIBLIN/Dominion Post

CITY BY THE SEA: Enjoying Christmas Day in the sun at Wellington's Scorching Bay are Holly and Isabel Watson. Balmy weather looks set to continue today and into the new year.

The sun came out and Wellingtonians flocked to the beach to enjoy the warm Christmas weather.

Most of the North Island enjoyed fine weather yesterday, with temperatures ranging from 19 degrees celsius through to the low 20s, MetService said.

And the balmy weather looks set to continue today and into the new year. (abridged)

Winter storms create $300m insurance bill

Dec 27, 2008 By Alanah May Eriksen Herald on Sunday

Slips caused major damage at Kawakawa Bay. Photo / Glenn Jeffrey

Raging winter storms that plagued the country, causing more than 200 slips in Auckland, cost insurance companies $300 million in claims this year - $50 million more than 2007.

Brutal weather was blamed for the loss of at least four lives, towns were cut off as roads flooded and tens of thousands of households were left without power.

Hundreds of people had minutes to gather important possessions before evacuating their homes.

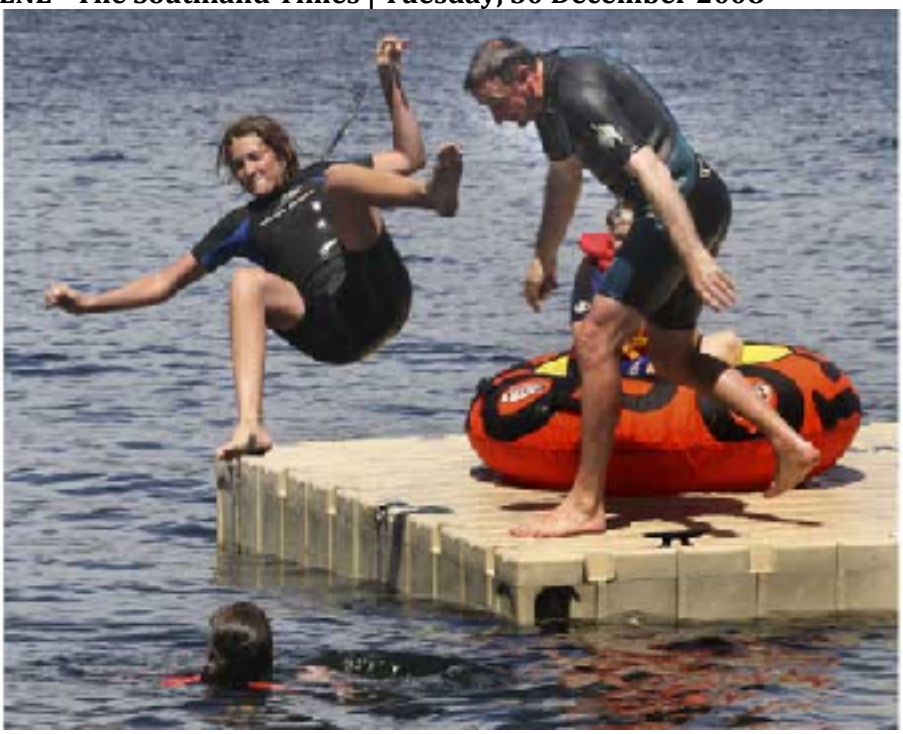
Several Aucklanders have had their houses condemned by the Earthquake Commission or, four months later, are still waiting to hear if they can return home.

Several people were unable to make claims for weeks due to power and telephone outages, but Insurance Council chief executive Chris Ryan said more than $70 million had been paid out as a result of North Island storms in July and August.

The biggest storms lashed the middle of the island on July 26 and 27, costing $26 million, and on July 30, 31 and August 1, costing $42 million.
The scale of claims made ranged from reparation for buildings that had been wiped out, to money for small earthquake-caused cracks in houses.
A hailstorm in the North Canterbury and Marlborough areas on August 26 saw $5 million worth of insurance claims and the Hastings earthquake on August 25, which had a 5.9 magnitude, cost $1.5 million.
More than $300 million worth of weather-related insurance claims were made this year compared with $250 million in 2007. This is a steady rise from previous years but was not as large as 2004 when a single storm in February in the Manawatu saw $130 million in claims. The widespread rain dump of more than 280mm was the region's worst recorded and drove more than 1000 people from their homes.
The country had also been spared floods as large as the Far North deluges in February and March last year which spurred evacuations, swept away buildings, trapped residents, closed roads and cut power, costing insurers $12.5 million.
The impact of climate change is affecting all New Zealanders and it will continue to do so
Weather-related claims are the biggest New Zealand insurance companies face annually. Single claims for earthquake-related damage are generally the largest but flooding is more common.

That was a hot one!

By AMY MILNE - The Southland Times | Tuesday, 30 December 2008



BARRY HARCOURT/ID 135187
TEMPERATURE TRANSITION: Kristen Froude, 14, of Invercargill on her way to a dunking in Lake Te Anau after some assistance from Doug Hall, also of Invercargill. The pontoon at the bathing beach is proving a popular place to cool off these holidays.
Soaring temperatures throughout the south are not expected to extend to New Year's Eve, according to the MetService. MetService forecaster Allister Gorman said people could expect a change today as a front would be passing over the lower South Island, bringing slightly cooler temperatures sad for some but a relief for others. (abridged)

HOT			**HOT**			**HOT**
MetService			**temperatures**			**yesterday**
*****	**Stewart**	**Island**	**(South**	**West**	**Cape)**	**20.4degC**

*	Invercargill	26.8degC
*	Gore	27.9degC
*	Balclutha	28degC
*	Queenstown	26.4degC
*	Wanaka	27degC
*	Cromwell	30degC
*	Alexandra	32degC
*	Te Anau/Manapouri	25.6degC

Warm and wet for Hogmanay

Dec 30, 2008 By Yvonne Tahana NZ Herald

New Year's Eve is looking wet across the North Island. Photo / Alan Gibson

Showers will welcome in 2009.

MetService forecaster Allister Gorman says that although he doesn't want to rain on anyone's parade for New Year's Eve, it is looking wet across the North Island.

Fronts moving east from the Tasman Sea are bringing the bad weather, he says.

"Unfortunately, it will probably start the day quite nice but deteriorate towards midnight, with showers moving into many of the western areas.

"It'll be good for a pre-evening celebration barbecue - but if you're heading out at night to watch fireworks or whatever else is going on, you'll find you'll need to pack the umbrella.

"It won't be cold."

New Year's Day, though, is shaping up to be fine and sunny, says Mr Gorman.

"If it was any other day of the year, people would probably be quite happy if it rained during the night and was fine during the day."

For a printable pdf of this newsletter : http://metsoc.rsnz.org/Newsletter/clipsdec2008.pdf