

Queensland Snow

A Natural History of Queensland Snow from 1878
by Nicholas Oughton: Updated: 1st November, 2022

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Wallangarra in the early morning of 17 July, 2015.

Strictly speaking, it should not snow in sub-tropical Queensland, but it does and perhaps more often than you would think! When the chill thrill calls, many Queenslanders head for the snowline.

These pages provide a history of Queensland snowfall; descriptions of the most dramatic events; how to predict a snow event and; where snow is most likely to be found in South-East Queensland. It's a do-it-yourself guide to predicting, finding and enjoying the wonder of Queensland snow.

The Romance of Snow

*He who has seen the eternal snows,
Noonday white and evening rose,
Though he descends down into the plain,
Never is the same again,
And in the mind and dirt and sweat,
Cannot loose, cannot forget,
The radiance of the eternal snows,
Noonday white and evening rose.*

Check out these pages also...

Additional stories can be found here:

[A personal account of the 1984 snow event](#)
[A snow chaser's guide to finding snow in Queensland](#)
[Snowfall records for Queensland from 1878](#)
[Some unusual Queensland snow events](#)



Building a Snowman, Girraween National Park, Queensland, 4th July 1984. Photo courtesy of Ulrike and Siegfried Manietta

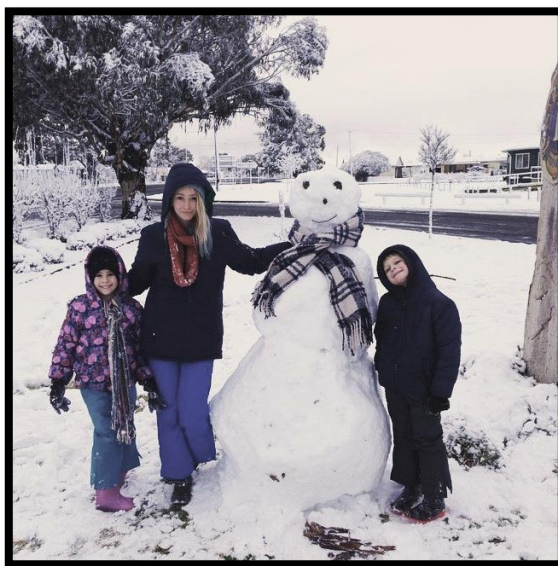


'Job done' Girraween National Park, Queensland, 4th July 1984. Photo courtesy of Ulrike and Siegfried Manietta

For many children, the excitement of freshly fallen snow and the magical transformation it makes of a familiar world is seldom forgotten. For those who have never seen snow, stories of white Christmases; Artic adventure; the conquest of high mountains; winter holidays in exotic countries; and fairy tales set in unfamiliar snow bound countries infuse a powerful mythology – one that lasts into adult life.

For those who don't live among the eternal snows, but where snow is more rarely experienced such as South-East Queensland, winter snowfall provides a diversion from the humdrum regularity of everyday life – a period of imaginative escape – a remnant of childhood dreams and fantasies.

Unusual falls of snow can transform people, making them more gregarious, good humored and generous of spirit. When it snows in Queensland, many folk pack up their cars with warm cloths, children and excitement, and head for the Queensland snow line – to build a snowman, throw a snowball, enjoy a glass of wine by a fireside, a Christmas in July.



Above the Queensland snow line. Snowman and friends at Wallangarra 17th July, 2015

Snow in South-East Queensland

Historically speaking, snowfall in Queensland is not rare occurring on average a little more than once per year over the past 144 years. However, several years may pass without snow falling somewhere in Queensland.

Snow has fallen as far North as the Clark Ranges near Mackay, as far West as Texas and has even been observed falling in Brisbane.

According to the ‘Argus’ of Tuesday 8th August 1982.

The reported fall of snow in Brisbane has been confirmed by many persons who witnessed it. The snow was most noticeable in Woolloongabba, but in Stanley Street, South Brisbane, it was sufficiently heavy to allow of people wiping it from their clothing...It is said that snow fell in this city 35 years ago. At Toowoomba, the local paper says, on the same date, "towards 12 o'clock, light flaky snow began to flit about, and these were followed by unmistakable drifting showers of real snow. Spring-hill road was quite white, as were also the footpaths in some parts of the town, and we learn that at Clifton-plains about 2in. of snow covered the ground.

Two Recent Big Snow Events in in South East Queensland

The Big Snow, 13th to 17th July 2015

This surprising event commenced on Sunday 13th of July with snow flurries and sleet at Eukey some 12 kilometres from Stanthorpe. Local cafe owner Amanda Blair said business had been booming in the border town since Saturday. "It has been so busy. From 7:30am in the morning there was a stream of traffic heading south and it was like that all weekend," said Ms. Blair. "As soon as people hear about snow they head to the border". Snow again fell at Eukey on Monday the 14th with settling falls just over the Border at Mt Mackenzie. These events, however, were just teasers for what was to follow.

Observing this exciting event in the late evening of July 16th, Ken Kato wrote: "At approximately 11:40pm some tufts of cloud started to appear – then within the space of only a few mins it went from absolutely clear skies to totally overcast. The first flakes fell at 11:45pm. By midnight, it started to really come down. By 1am, it was close to blizzard/snowstorm conditions at times, with wet snow changing to dry powder snow for quite a while. Dry snowflakes were blowing horizontally with gusts of wind roaring through the trees and making the power lines hum. Visibility was down to around 100m and snowdrifts began forming,

I almost got bogged in deep snow near Eukey in an area with no mobile phone reception so I thought I might have to flag down a passing motorist. The only thing that saved me was collecting a mass of sticks and stones to put under my tyres to get just enough grip to get out. The weight of the snow was also bending many of the branches on smaller trees right over onto the road itself.

I got bad frostbite despite wearing boots, socks and gloves due to prolonged exposure to snow and wind-chill; and having to take gloves off to take pics and video.



Snow on the fence near Eukey morning of the 17th July 2015. Photo courtesy of Ken Kato

Ken's snow chasing on the night of 16/17th July reminds us of precautions we should all take when exposing ourselves to extreme weather events. I also snow-chased on the Granite Belt with my family on Friday 17th; imbibing a lovely locally produced red over lunch at a local Winery.



The author, Nicholas Oughton, 17th July 2015 at 2.06pm. Eukey Road west of Hidden Creek Winery. Photo Sue Pickford

The Great Fall of July 1984

An extraordinary lemming like rush to see Queensland's very own snowfields began when hundreds of sightseers headed for the Granite Belt. The local telephone system became overloaded and broke down as people endeavored to tell their friends of the great event. To read my personal account of this great event, go [here](#).

Snow began falling on The Granite Belt on Tuesday 3rd of July with falls continuing intermittently till Thursday the 5th. Heavy falls were recorded at Mount Tully and Eukey (South-East of Stanthorpe) where the snow cover was reported to be 60cm deep in surrounding areas with 15cm in the town. In Stanthorpe, the snow was 'welcomed with sheer delight by most residents' (Border Post July 5 1984).

The snowmen and snowball fights that erupted on every corner of the town attested to the general euphoria. To the east of the Stanthorpe, graziers began moving ewes, and lambs into shelter as the snow persisted.

‘Just like a Christmas scene’ is how stranded Warwick bowler Mrs. Pat Collins described the view from her Tenterfield motel room as she and five friends played cards watching the snow fall (Daily News July 4 1984). The bowlers, who were visiting Tenterfield became stranded when snow and ice made the road back into Queensland dangerous.

In Brisbane, ‘It also tried hard to snow’ reported a spokesman for the weather Bureau. Guests on the 21st floor of Lennon’s Hotel in the city told how they had seen snow blowing past their windows. The snow, however, turned to sleet before hitting the Brisbane streets. The closest settling snow to Brisbane fell on Mount Tambourine and Mount Glorious, both a one-hour drive from the City.



‘The Pyramids’, Girraween National Park, viewed across open fields during the snow even of July 1984. Photo courtesy of Ulrike and Siegfried Manietta.

There are ways to forecast snowfall in Queensland using information from weather maps and chatter on social Web sites. For a snow chasers guide to predicting and finding snow in Southeast Queensland go [here](#).

The Snow Fall Record for Queensland from 1878

The snowfall record for Queensland from 1878 to date has been compiled from a number of sources including the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) Brisbane, newspapers, observer reports, dated photos and my own records. This record with comments can be found [here](#).

Are There Cycles in Snow Years?

An analysis of South-East Queensland snowfall history from 1878 shows a very loose cycle of approximately 4-5 years between good and poor snowy winters. This cycle, however, cannot be relied on in a predictive sense. Sadly, for snow lovers, the snowfall trend shows a steady decline. However, snow can fall somewhere in South-East Queensland at any time between the months of May and November averaging a fall every 1.16 years.

A second loose cycle shows a rotation of approximately 30-years between peak snow periods in South East Queensland. The most recent of these ‘fuzzy’ cycles should have peaked in the early 1990s, but did not arrive – climate change perhaps? The next peak should occur in the early 2020s – if at all. In addition, the gap years with no snow are becoming more frequent.

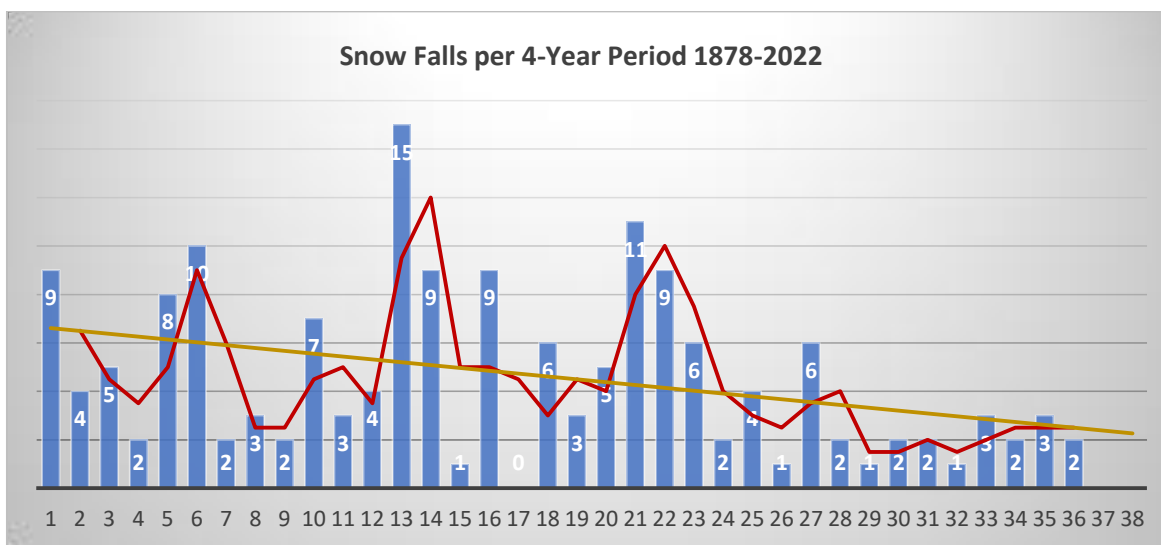


Figure 1.

Notes on Figure One

Figure one is a graph showing the snow days occurring in South East Queensland, (predominantly the Southern Downs and Granite Belt districts) during the past 144 years. There have been 164 snow days during this period, which represents just over one snow day per year. Figure one also shows the trend line (orange) which shows a snow-day decline of around 50 per cent for the period.

Clearly the 50-year period from 1926-1975 was prominent for snow in South East Queensland realizing 60 per cent of total falls occurring during the past 144 years. Eighty snow events of 2-4 days occurred over last 144 years in South East Queensland, thus there is a 55 per cent chance of a snow 'event' (e.g. falls on more than one day) happening somewhere in SE Queensland.

There have been two major 4-year snowy periods in Southeast Queensland. These were 1926-1929, period 13 and 1958-1961 (period 11), see figure one. Such snowy periods could occur again, however, climate change in SE Queensland works against this probability.

Prior to the 2015 event, Peter Burr (Armadale Weather) wrote that: "With winters becoming milder it seems unlikely that any further major events such as 1984 will occur again. However, with the ever-increasing erratic nature of weather systems, nothing can be ruled out. With the right conditions occurring during the winter months, other heavy snowfall events are still possible".

Peter's prediction came true in July 2015, with widespread heavy snow spread from the Central Tablelands of NSW to Queensland's Granite Belt and border ranges.

University of Melbourne climate scientist Professor David Karoly adds that: "Natural variability in the weather is still very important, so while you have climate change and global warming, that doesn't mean that occasions of cold extremes suddenly disappear. It just means there will be a reduced frequency of these cold events occurring".

The Best Time to see Snow and Sleet in S.E. Queensland

Figure two shows that the best dates to observe snow or sleet falling in SE Queensland is the 20-day period (periods 9 and 10 in figure 2), being the 11th - 30th July. According to past records, forty per cent of snow/sleet in SE Queensland occurs in July. The red line shows the 2-period moving average.

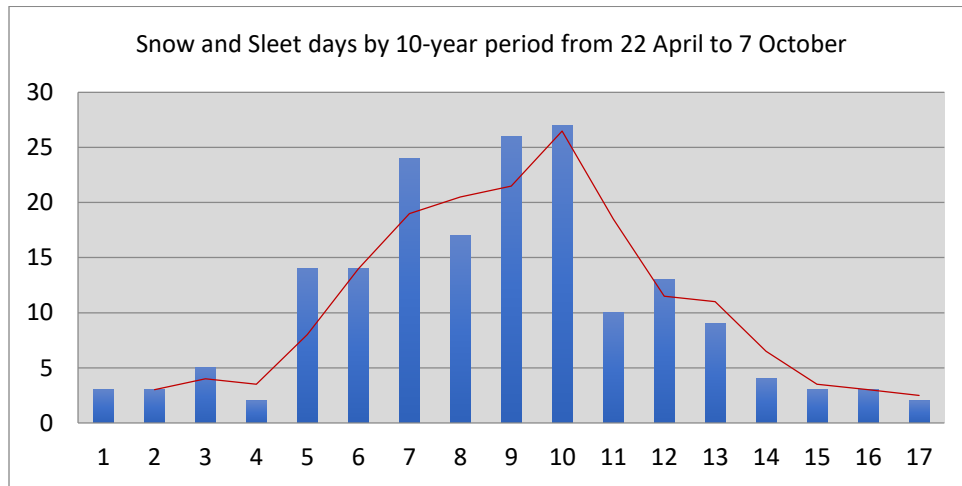


Figure 2.

See the page ‘A snow chasers guide to finding snow in snow in Queensland’ for Snow predicting tools.



Fun in the Snow, in Stanthorpe, 17th July, 2015. Photo courtesy of the ABC

*Glancing upwards, as the clouds glide across the moon,
Silver stars are out mingling with the drifting snowflakes,
A sight to enjoy here and now, for morning will be here soon,
A beautiful Christmas memory, deep in my heart to take.*

*Only one car comes up the street, as I walk along our lane,
Just a friendly snowman is there to greet me with a hello,
I stop, adjust his top hat, and reposition his pipe and cane,
This cold-hearted man has made a child smile, I know.*

*My ears lead me to the street corner where carollers sing,
As those old familiar notes drift towards me on the air,
More sounds seem to awaken as the bells distantly ring,
I felt nothing but a warming glow as I was standing there.*

Extract form ‘Christmas Snow’ by Kelly Deschler

If any reader has a snow story of their own, please contact me by email. I would love to use your story in these pages if you are happy for me to do so. Also, your observation and report of snow falling in SE Queensland will make a valuable contribution to the record of snow in our State.

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The romance of Snow. My Cousin Matthew is a fine painter of railway themes. This painting shows a passenger service arriving at snowy *West Hoathly* (UK) in the early 1950's. The picture, courtesy of Matthew Cousins