



Weather and climate – with a southern emphasis

‘No topic of conversation is more general than that of the weather. “It looks like fine weather”, “I am afraid it is going to rain”, and similar sayings form perhaps the commonest introduction to ordinary small talk.’ So wrote Raglan schoolteacher Henry T. Gibson, himself a Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society, introducing his *Elementary Weather Studies* (1907), probably the first New Zealand book devoted solely to our weather and climate.

Little has changed. Weather remains a general topic of conversation, and always will. But people’s perceptions of the climate of places are often divorced from reality. New Zealanders as a whole are often misinformed about the climate of the far south, and listening to some of the TV weather presenters this is not surprising. One recalls, for instance, an occasion when the lowest temperature of the day was attributed by TV1 to ‘Le Bons Bay in Dunedin’!

THIS Bulletin does not attempt to include every book, let alone every reference to climate and weather contained in the Hocken Library. The first part lists a selection of references dealing with New Zealand as a whole, including information on southern New Zealand. The second part lists references which focus on Otago and Southland.

NEW ZEALAND

Bibliographies

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- Most of the maps listed are included within periodical articles.

Statistical Data

Climatic data appeared annually in *Statistics of New Zealand* from its first publication in 1858 (which included data for 1853 onwards) until 1920. The *New Zealand Gazette* regularly carried tables of climatic data, but more detailed information is available from 1928 onwards in *Meteorological Observations . . .*, published by the N.Z. Meteorological Service, of which Hocken holds the volumes for 1943, 1955–60, 1966–69, 1972–75 and 1986. For overall views the *Summaries of Climatological Observations to 1980* (N.Z. Met. Service, Wellington, 1983) is useful.

Periodicals

Until 1981 there was no periodical which dealt solely with New Zealand’s weather and climate. In that year the N.Z. Meteorological Society began publication of *Weather & Climate*. From 1868 the *Transactions of the N.Z. Institute*, which later changed its title and format a number of times and is currently known as the *Transactions of the Royal Society of N.Z.*, has contained a number of articles dealing with weather and climate. Other periodicals which have regularly included articles on weather and climate are the *N.Z. Journal of Science and Technology* (1918–57), which was succeeded by the *N. Z. Journal of Science* (1958–84), and the *N. Z. Geographer* (1945–).

It should also be noted that the *N.Z. Official Yearbook* (1892–) has always included a section dealing with climate. These sections have been expanded and rewritten from time to time, and occasionally contain special information. Thus the 1990 *Yearbook* (p. 11) carries a table of ‘Major Weather Events’ in New Zealand from 1863 to 1990, a number of which refer to southern New Zealand. Complete runs of all the periodicals mentioned above are held in the Hocken Library.

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OTAGO–SOUTHLAND

Statistics

Rainfall and temperature statistics have been collected from the earliest days, and some climatic data was recorded even before 1848. *Comparative Statement. Thermometer: Wellington and Otago* (Flotsam &

Jetsam, Volume 2/27) covers the period from Jan. 1841 to Jan. 1842. Early data for the organised European settlement era is found in *Meteorological Observations: Dunedin* (F&J, 2/26), covering Oct. 1848 to Aug. 1849; *Comparative Weather Reports* (F&J, 2/32), April–June 1849 and 1850; *Table of the Weather: Dunedin* (F&J, 2/31), April–June 1850; and *Weather Reports: Otago* (F&J, 1/58), April–May 1850.

A meteorological observatory was established in Dunedin in 1862 and observations taken there were regularly published in the *Otago Provincial Government Gazette* (1862–76). Scattered climatic data from various sources is to be found in the *Otago Journal* (1848–52); in reports of early explorations by surveyors such as J.T. Thomson ('Report . . . on the Reconnaissance [sic] Survey of the Southern Districts of Otago', *Otago Prov. Govt Gazette*, vol. 3, 22 Sept. 1858, pp. 256–69); and in memoirs such as W.H.S. Roberts' *Southland in 1856–1857* (Invercargill, 1895).

Newspapers

A major source for southern weather data are the newspapers, which faithfully record weather and climatic events as they occur. Publication of comments and rain-fall figures began remarkably early. [See *Bulletin 3* for the Hocken's holdings of southern newspapers].

Examples of early reports on extreme weather conditions include 'The Late Gale', *Otago Witness*, 30 Dec. 1871, pp. 7–8, and the *Otago Daily Times* of 29 March 1879, p. 3, detailing the extent and effect of contemporary floods. More recently, on 4 November 1987, the *ODT* ('City Swelters in Record Heat') recorded Dunedin's hottest November Day (31.3 °C) in more than 120 years. But examples over the past century and a half are beyond counting. Historical accounts of weather events are also frequent, such as Bryan James's three-part *ODT* series on the record 1939 snowfall ('Dunedin's Big Snow', 'A City Under Siege' & 'The Inevitable Thaw', 6, 11 & 13 Sept. 1986). Ray Hargreaves examined the myth of 'An Iceberg off Otago's Coast?' in the *Dunedin Star Weekender*, 11 July 1993, p. 22.

Don't overlook 'Letters to the Editor' columns in the various newspapers, for they often reflect popular attitudes to weather, particularly southern weather. Thus, Gordon Forlong wrote in the *ODT* (13 Jan. 1882, p. 4) that 'The Otago people will yet mourn much over their loss when the climate, through our own carelessness [becomes] drier and drier and colder and colder'. He was concerned over the destruction of forests in the south, for a belief at that time was that trees attract rain. Newspapers also reported such matters as debates over the location of weather recording stations in Dunedin and the region at large.

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OTHER HOCKEN RESOURCES

While this Bulletin focuses primarily on weather and climate as discussed in books and periodicals, other avenues of research should not be overlooked. Hocken Archives, though not holding any single collection of papers devoted solely to the subject, contain much material in which weather information can be found—not least personal and farm diaries. Many images of floods, snowfalls, cloud formations and similar subjects can be found in the Photograph Collection—indexed by location where this is known, and mostly traceable by computer. And the Pictures Collection not only contains paintings specifically concerned with aspects of weather—such as John Gully's 1877 watercolour *Thunderstorm Approaching the Hotel, Wanaka*—but also a body of landscape art which may be worth consulting.

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