



1947

The 'Long Winter' in the North Yorkshire Moors

The winter of 1946-47 started out fairly mild, but on 22nd January the temperature dropped and it began snowing, and from that day until 17th March snow fell every day somewhere in Britain. Biting winds drove the snow into drifts up to 7 metres deep, while the temperature fell as low as -21°C.

The snow caused many difficulties across Britain. Roads and railways were blocked. The railways needed to be cleared so that coal could be brought to power stations. This was done by 100,000 British and Polish troops as well as German prisoners-of-war. Electricity was limited to 19 hours per day. Radio broadcasting was limited and television was suspended altogether.

In the countryside, sheep and cattle were buried and often froze or starved to death. Across Britain a quarter of the sheep stock was lost - it took farmers up to six years to build up their flocks again. Vegetables were frozen in the ground. War-time rationing still in place (World War II had ended in 1945) and the effect of the long winter meant that food was under even stricter measures.

On the North Yorkshire Moors the snow filled the roads and lanes, cut off villages and caused huge challenges for farmers. Mains electricity had not yet reached here, so its loss made little difference; people simply continued with their paraffin lamps and stoves and used peat on the fire or in the range for cooking. When supplies of food, paraffin or coal began to run low, people hitched their horses to sledges and made their way across the fields to the nearest town - but it took a long time to get there and back.

Money was limited in Britain because of the high cost of fighting World War II. In addition to this the government had decided to spend money on nationalising industries, including the railways and coal-mining, while the National Health Service was being launched and needed money. There was not a lot to spare. Because of all this and the problems caused by the snow, times were hard.

When the snow stopped, a thaw began and additional rain caused widespread flooding. It was the wettest March for 300 years. 31 counties across Britain and at least 100,000 properties were affected by the floodwater, and the army was once again called in to help.

Following such hardship many people decided to strike out for a different life and emigrated to *Canada* or *Australia*. In Britain, taxes were raised once more - but the country then enjoyed a glorious warm summer.



Farmers digging through the snow and feeding sheep at a farm near Lockton in the Moors in 1947.



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How many days of snow-fall did Britain get between January and March in 1947?

54 days

2. How cold did it get and how deep were some snow drifts?

-21°C and up to 7 metres deep.

3. What effect did the snow have on transport across Britain?

Roads and railways were blocked.

4. Why did the railways need to be cleared?

To get coal to the power stations.

5. Who cleared the railways?

100,000 British and Polish troops as well as German prisoners-of-war.

6. Which other services were affected?

Electricity, radio and television.

7. What happened to some of the farm animals in the countryside?

Sheep and cattle were buried and some froze to death.

8. Why might people be hungry in 1947?

There was still rationing after the war and vegetables froze in the ground.

9. On the North Yorkshire Moors, what did the snow do?

Filled roads and lanes, cut off villages and caused huge challenges for farmers.

10. Why was losing electricity supplies across Britain little hardship for people on the North Yorkshire Moors?

Because mains electricity had not reached there by 1947.

11. How did people on the North Yorkshire Moors get supplies and how long did it take them?

They hitched their horses to sledges and made their way across the fields to the nearest town. It took a long time to get there and back.

12. Why was the government short of money in Britain?

Because of the cost of fighting the war, nationalising several industries, and the launch of the National Health Service.

13. Who helped again when the floods came as a result of the thaw and additional rain?

The Army.

14. What did some people decide to do as a result of the hardship?

They decided to seek a new life by emigrating to Canada or Australia.

14. Finally, what was a positive thing that happened in 1947?

It was a gloriously warm summer.

Find out more:

- Blog posting from the Met Office - <https://blog.metoffice.gov.uk/2017/01/26/winter-1947-brought-a-freeze-to-post-war-britain/>
- Rare film footage of a family's experience of the 1947 winter in West Yorkshire - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUcAfHD1BAY>