

# Britain Paralyzed by Longest Cold Snap in 19 Years

Britain Paralyzed by Longest Cold Snap in 19 Years

As U.K. shivers, hundreds of cars stuck in snow

Flights, trains and classes cancelled amid winter blast, worst in 30 years

The Associated Press, Jan. 6, 2010

## LONDON

- Unusually heavy snowfall stranded hundreds of motorists, disrupted trains and shut down schools and airports across Britain on Wednesday as the country suffered through its longest cold snap in nearly 30 years.

## Airports

across the country were paralyzed, with London's Gatwick and Stansted unable to operate and hundreds of flights canceled. At Gatwick, where the only runway had been shut for snow clearance all day, more than 240 flights were canceled. London Luton airport was closed until early afternoon. A dozen flights were also canceled at London's Heathrow airport, Europe's busiest, with long lines building at check-in desks.

## The

foul weather also badly hit Britain's road network. Sections of the country's most important highways &mdash; including the M1, which links London and Leeds &mdash; were closed, and the military was called in overnight to help rescue motorists when up to 1,000 vehicles were caught in a snow-related traffic jam in Hampshire, in southern England. Many people were evacuated to nearby rescue centers but some slept in their vehicles overnight.

## The

demands on rescue workers in southern England were so overwhelming that coast guard workers turned their skills from sea to land to help out.

### Train

services were also affected, with lines in southern England reporting reduced services. Eurostar, whose service through the Channel Tunnel was frozen for days by snow-related problems in the run-up to Christmas, said it was canceling four services Wednesday due to the weather. Nationwide, thousands of schools closed down.

### However

London's transport system, which practically ground to a halt when snow hit the capital in February, only suffered minor disruptions.

### Ill-equipped for heavy snowfall

### British

winters are typically mild, and cities and towns are generally ill-equipped to deal with heavy snowfall. With the worst-hit areas seeing up to 16 inches of snow, officials and road crews were struggling to keep up.

### Several

local governments were running out of sand and salt &mdash; with some reportedly emptying department stores of supplies. The wintry weather has prompted some police forces to urge drivers to stay off the roads and some trash collectors to suspend their rounds.

### The

national weather office says Britain is experiencing its longest cold snap since 1981. The unusually cold weather is expected to continue for the next two weeks.

Forecasters say that, while rare, the recent bout of cold weather isn't necessarily a sign of climate change.

### Robin

Thwaytes, the duty forecaster at Britain's weather office, said "it's very unusual for something like this to last as long as it has," but noted that such events can happen every 20 to 30 years.

Copyright 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.