

Wintry spell with deep snow for northern and north-east Scotland, January 2026

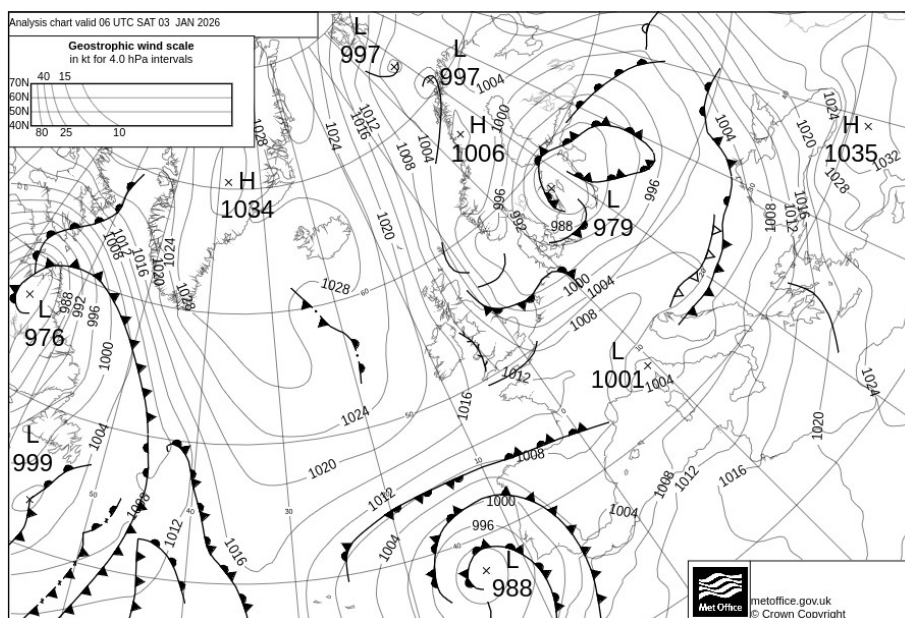
At the start of January 2026, a northerly airflow brought persistent snow showers resulting in significant accumulations of lying snow across northern and north-east Scotland. The worst affected areas recorded depths of 30 to 50cm, this lying largely un-melted for around a week. While northern and north-east Scotland are prone to lying snow, depths as great as this are comparatively unusual, particularly in the UK's warming climate.

Impacts

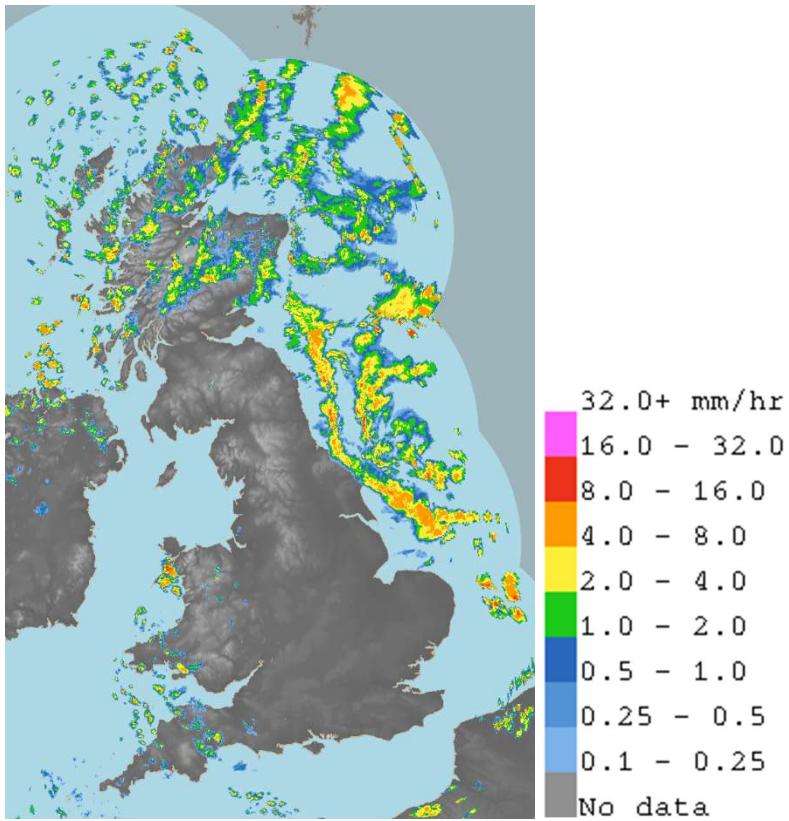
Hundreds of schools were closed across Aberdeenshire and Moray, Orkney, Shetland, and Highland Scotland. Aberdeenshire Council declared a major incident. College campuses were also closed. Deep snow also resulted in major travel disruption with many roads impassable and others extremely hazardous, with some local communities cut off. Heavy snowdrifts also blocked railway lines across northern Scotland. Flight operations were temporarily suspended at Aberdeen Airport. The snow more generally disrupted many people's daily activities. A number of sporting fixtures were postponed due to frozen pitches. The snow however was welcomed at Scotland's ski centres.

Weather data

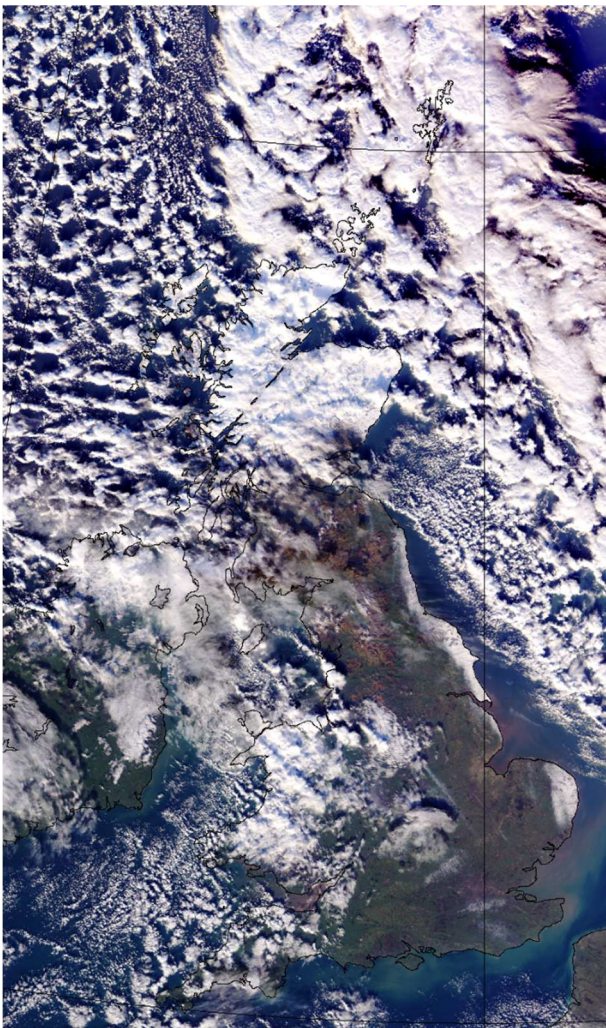
The analysis chart at 0600 UTC 3 January 2026 shows a flow of Arctic Maritime air pushing south across the UK, with an occluded front in the North Sea and a line of convergence in the Irish Sea affecting west Wales.



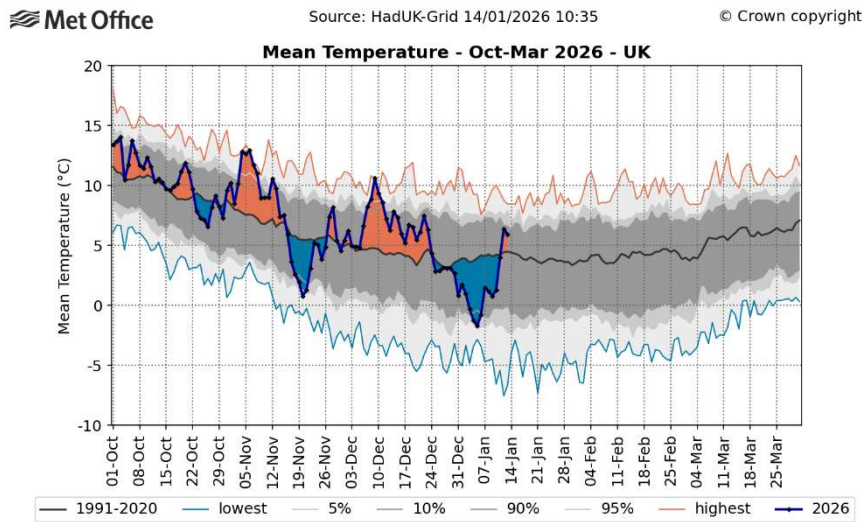
The rain-radar image at 0600 UTC 3 January 2026 shows wintry precipitation affecting west Wales and eastern coastal fringes, with a sustained flow of heavy wintry showers affecting the northern half of Scotland. This resulted in significant accumulations of lying snow in any locations exposed to the north, accompanied by drifting in a bitterly cold northerly wind.



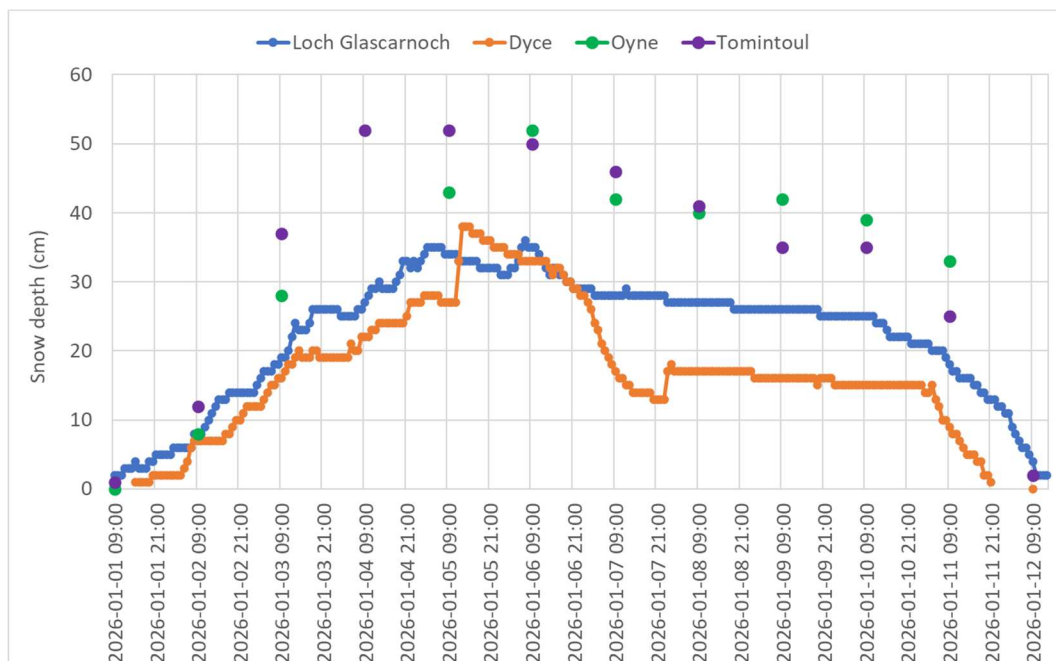
The visible satellite image on 4 January 2026 shows persistent snow showers affecting the UK from the north, with lying snow cover across northern Scotland, much of Wales and North Sea coastal fringes. Image copyright Met Office / NOAA / NASA.



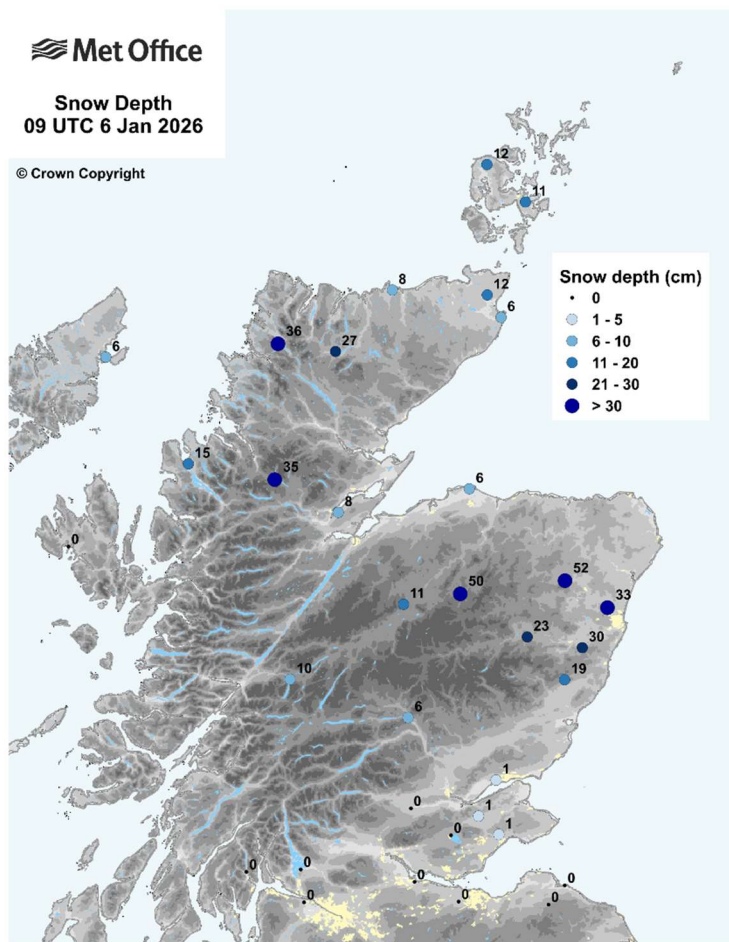
The graph below shows UK average daily mean temperature from October 2025 to January 2026, and illustrates the transition from mild weather through much of December to a spell of much colder weather after Christmas and extending into the New Year. On 5 January, most parts of the UK struggled to rise much above freezing, with a daily maximum temperature of -0.9°C at Sennybridge, Powys, and -1.0°C at Leek, Thorncliffe, Staffordshire. As wind speeds then reduced, there were some hard frosts under clear skies. Temperatures fell well below -5°C across most of the UK on 6 January including -12.5°C at Marham, Norfolk. Even so, although this was a notable cold snap, the temperatures were not especially unusual for the time of year.



The graph below from 1 to 12 January 2026 shows accumulating snow at locations in northern and north-east Scotland – Loch Glascarnoch (Ross & Cromarty), Dyce (Aberdeen), Oyne (Aberdeenshire) and Tomintoul (Moray). The persistent snow showers resulted in maximum depths of between around 30 and 50 cm at these locations. This snow remained largely un-melted for a week before a thaw set in on the 11th, associated with a change to a mild south-westerly Atlantic weather type.



The map below shows snow depths across northern Scotland (excluding Shetland) at 0900 UTC 6 January 2026, with 30 to 50cm in the deepest areas. Scotland's mountains saw extensive deep snow with drifting. (The map is based on data available at time of publication).



Lying snow as deep as this is comparatively unusual, particularly given the UK’s warming climate. There have been other spells of snow affecting Scotland in recent years with depths of 20 to 30cm – for example **January 2024** across Caithness and Sutherland (37cm at Altnaharra, Sutherland on 18th), **February 2021** around Edinburgh and Aberdeen (38cm at Aboyne, Aberdeenshire on 10th), **January 2018** and **March 2018** (both 20 to 40cm in the Southern Uplands) and **January 2013** (20 to 30cm in parts of eastern Scotland). The most extensive deep lying snow Scotland has experienced in recent decades was late **November to early December 2010** (the first of two very cold wintry spells), with depths of 30 to 50cm around Aberdeen, Edinburgh and many eastern areas. The north and north-east of Scotland are prone to lying snow, and every snow event is different, with large spatial variations in snow depths – making comparisons difficult. However, in the worst affected areas, the snow depths of 50cm arguably made this locally the most significant snow since late November to early December 2010.

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