

UK snow: Five things you might not know



Sarah Keith-Lucas
Lead Weather Presenter

25 december 2024

The mention of snow in our forecasts always **pricks people ears up**, whether it is the prospect of sledging and snowball fights, or the threat of travel disruption and school closures.

Love it or loathe it, here are five things you might not know about snow

1. Snow is not white

It is actually translucent.

When light enters a snowflake, the complex structure of the ice crystals scatter the light into the seven colours of the rainbow.

These colours are reflected so many times within a snowflake that they combine to make white light, and this is what is reflected back to our eyes.

2. The deepest snowfall ever recorded in the UK is 1.65m

A snow depth of 1.65m or 5ft 5in is almost deep enough to completely bury the average adult.

This was recorded back in March 1947 in Denbighshire, North Wales, during the snowiest UK winter of the 20th century. Snow drifts caused by blowing winds also led to drifts as deep as 6m (20ft).



Scotland sees on average 23 days of lying snow each year

3. Scots have 421 words for snow

Scotland is the snowiest part of the UK due to its latitude and altitude, so it is no surprise that **the language around snow is much more diverse in Scotland** compared to the rest of the UK.

Some of the 421 terms to describe snow include snaw (snow), feeble (to swirl) and skelf (a large snowflake).

The Cairngorms mountain range averages 76 snow days every year. The number of days when snow falls is higher, but it does not always settle.

4. Snow falls at an average speed of three miles an hour

This is around walking pace but, in calm conditions, a snowflake can take around an hour to reach the ground after leaving the base of the cloud.

The path and time taken for a snowflake to fall depends on several factors including the wind speed, the humidity of the air and the height of the cloud. Strong winds combining with heavy snowfall lead to blizzards which can be particularly disruptive.



Intricate 'dendritic' snowflakes resemble tree branches

5. Snowflakes are always six-sided

Snowflakes come in many different shapes and sizes. No two flakes are identical, but all have six sides or six points.

Due to tiny differences in atmospheric conditions, each flake will create a unique pattern.

And a bonus fact to finish: According to **Guinness World Records, external**, the largest single snowflake ever measured was 38cm (15in) wide, and was found in Montana, US back in 1887.