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UNH State Climatologist: 2001 Was a Year of Record-Breaking Weather

By [Sharon Keeler](#)
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Editors/News Directors:
**UNH Professor Barry Keim is available for
comment at 603-862-3136. He is in his office today,
Jan. 11, will be out Jan. 14 and 15, and will return
on Jan. 16.**

DURHAM, N.H. -- 2001 was a year of weather extremes, says New Hampshire state climatologist Barry Keim.

Keim, associate professor in the geography department and in UNH's Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space says the year was marked by contrasts -- record-breaking snowfalls, unusually warm temperatures, and extreme drought.

The following is Keim's list of the five top New Hampshire weather events of 2001, in chronological order:

- **Snowstorm of March 6-7.** Forty inches in Nottingham; 36 inches in Dover; 34 inches in Hampton; and 32 inches in Durham. In Durham, where a long-term record has been maintained since 1926, this storm broke the all-time record snowfall event of 26 inches recorded on Feb. 24-26. 1 969.

"Nothing unusual about this storm," says Keim. "It was a classic Nor'easter where we took the brunt of the storm. The media actually portrayed the storm as a bust, because it was predicted to slam the entire East Coast, but instead the heavy snow was deflected north into southern New Hampshire, Vermont and upstate New

York."

Keim adds that snowstorms during March can be particularly strong because sea surface temperatures are warming and weather systems carry more moisture.

"But you still have cold air coming down from Canada. When the two air masses merge, you can get really big snow falls."

- **Snowstorm of March 11.** Although this storm only produced about a foot of snow in southern New Hampshire, it fell on an already deep snowpack from the lack of any winter thawing, and, combined with the storm of March 6-7, produced some of the deepest snow depths recorded in southern N.H. in many decades.

"Our diligent weather observer in Greenland noted that he had a snowpack depth of 40 inches on the ground, which was the deepest he had ever recorded in about 25 years of taking observations," says Keim.

Snow depths reached 52 inches in Alexandria, 49 inches in Fitzwilliam, 45 inches in Meredith, 44 inches in New Durham, and 46 inches in Walpole.

- **Heatwave of August 6-10.** Some of the hottest temperatures experienced in the Granite State in years were recorded during this four- to five-day period when temperatures soared into the 90s nearly every day, and even reached into the upper 90s. On Aug. 9, afternoon temperatures reached 99 at Nashua, 99 at Durham, 98 at Concord, 97 at Keene, 95 at Whitefield and 93 at Berlin.

- **Drought.** The lack of rain during the entire year has caused many problems, from wells running dry to hampering the ski industry. For the state, 2001 was the third driest year on record, dating back to 1895. April was particularly dry, followed by an extensive dry period statewide from Mid-July through December. During this five to six month period, precipitation was only about half of what would be considered normal.

"By years end, the state was in the second worst drought of the past century, according to the Palmer Drought Severity Index, bowing only to the drought of 1965," says Keim. "Further-more, these are the worst

drought conditions ever experienced at this point in the year, wreaking havoc on the ski industry which has not had much snow and needs water to produce it artificially."

- **Mild December.** Statewide, New Hampshire just experienced the third warmest December on record, since record keeping began in 1895. Daily records were broken all over state on Dec. 1, 5 and 6, when temperatures soared into the upper 60s, and even reached into the 70s at many locations in southern N.H. on the 6th.

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