History item 1

February 2011

Arctic blast grips the ***United Kingdom***

Over 200 cars were stranded in around 30 centimetres of snow overnight in Devon, a county in southwest England. Many of the occupants of these cars had to be rescued by the police, army, mountain rescue and other emergency workers.

Over 1000 schools were closed, many in the west of the country, where rural areas were virtually cut off from the outside world as snow made the minor roads impassable to all except 4 wheel drive vehicles. Train services were disrupted in both Wales and northern England. This table shows the number of schools closed in some of the local authorities:

A spokeswoman for the Highways Agency said that the two Severn bridges, linking South Wales to England, were closed for "safety reasons in the present weather conditions".

Flights were suspended at Bristol airport in southwest England, while Luton airport, to the north of London and Stansted airport, north east of London also saw disruption.

Five days of heavy snowfall, which is extremely unusual for this region, have led to shortages of grit to spread on roads, with some local authorities appealing for help from neighbouring areas. The price of this has trebled from some suppliers, and some local authorities are spreading cooking and table salt on the roads in an effort to keep the transport network flowing. A county council spokesman in Berkshire, near London said today "Gritting routes will have to be prioritised. The district's network of secondary roads will not be re-gritted until further supplies are obtained, and roadside salt bins will not be replenished".

Despite the disruption, there have been many ‘picture postcard’ scenes, and many newspapers and websites have been showing images of a “Winter Wonderland”. Schoolchildren across the region have been enjoying the conditions, although this did lead to the tragic death of a 16 year old girl in a freak sledging accident in South Yorkshire. Many of the schoolchildren that were interviewed in southern England had never experienced snow like this in their lifetime and were reveling in the chance to play in these weird conditions.

On Friday, England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales were all plunged into travel chaos as fresh snowstorms battered these countries. Much of England was paralysed as traffic ground to a standstill and abandoned cars littered country lanes and back roads. England recorded the heaviest falls of snow in nearly 20 years.