

# **Worst winter rainfall since 1766 in parts of Britain**

February 6 2014, by Danny Kemp

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Rob Bessant checks pipes moving flood water from fields into the River Parrett at Northmoor Green in Somerset, southwest England, on February 6, 2014

Britain announced emergency funding Thursday to cope with devastating floods after what officials said had been likely the worst spell of winter rainfall in at least 248 years.

Prime Minister David Cameron's government has faced criticism for its

handling of a crisis that has left swathes of the country under water, with a key railway line washed away.

Several people had to be rescued from deluged homes on Thursday while more storms are expected this weekend.

Across the English Channel, France's western tip was placed on alert for flooding as high tides wreaked havoc along Europe's Atlantic coast.

Britain's Communities Secretary Eric Pickles said the government would make an extra £30 million (\$48 million, 36 million euros) available for emergency repairs, on top of £100 million announced by Cameron on Wednesday.

Pickles said the winter was the "wettest since George III was on the throne", referring to Britain's monarch from 1760-1820.

He added that flood victims have "literally been through hell and high water".

Britain's Meteorological Office released figures confirming Pickles' assessment.

For southern England, "regional statistics suggest that this is one of, if not the most, exceptional periods of winter rainfall in at least 248 years", it said in a statement.



A man walks through flooded streets in the village of Moorland in Somerset, south-west England, on February 6, 2014

Parts of the region received five months of rainfall between December 12 and January 31.

The rainy winter has set records tumbling, being the wettest combined period of December and January across the United Kingdom since 1910, the Met Office said.

It was also the windiest December since 1969, based on the occurrence of winds over 69 mph.

For England alone it was the wettest December to January since 1876-1877 and the second wettest since [rainfall records](#) began in 1766.

## **"Nothing happened for so long"**

Firefighters in Somerset and the neighbouring county of Devon rescued 14 people from homes and stranded vehicles late Wednesday and early Thursday.

Rescuers in inflatable boats rescued four adults and three children from one house after a river burst its banks in Stoke St Gregory, a village that heir to the throne Prince Charles visited on Tuesday, a fire brigade spokesman said.

Prince Charles himself said on his trip to the region that the "tragedy is that nothing happened for so long".



A woman carries her dog as she walks through flooded streets in the village of Moorland in Somerset, south-west England, on February 6, 2014

Cameron personally took charge of the government's response on Wednesday after facing a growing tide of criticism for being too slow to aid stricken communities.

But the damage has kept coming, with the main train service connecting Devon and the county of Cornwall with the rest of Britain being suspended after part of the sea wall under the coastal railway line collapsed.

Meanwhile in France, Finistere, a department of Brittany which juts out into the Atlantic, was placed on red flooding alert and braced for two of its rivers, the Morlaix and the Laita, to burst their banks as a result of heavy rain forecast for Thursday.

The highest-level warning was issued by Meteo-France shortly after the agency placed 29 departments from Brittany to the Paris region on a second-tier orange alert.

Recent days have seen huge waves, gale-force winds and torrential rains combine to batter sea defences from the Basque country on France's border with Spain.

The storms sent a Spanish cargo ship crashing into a [sea wall](#) at the French port of Bayonne on Wednesday, splitting it clean in two.

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Citation: Worst winter rainfall since 1766 in parts of Britain (2014, February 6) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-worst-winter-rainfall-britain.html>

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