

Snow leaves thousands of motorists stranded in French Alps

December 28 2014



A car is stuck in the snow on December 27, 2014 on the road to Les Saisies ski resort in Savoie, central-eastern France

Heavy snowfall in the French Alps left some 15,000 drivers stranded overnight into Sunday, forcing many to pass the night in their cars and prompting officials to open emergency shelters.

The snow and ice hit as a rush of holidaymakers were heading to and

leaving from ski resorts in the Savoie region in southeastern France, where authorities set up shelters in at least 12 towns.

The snow, freezing rain and icy conditions caused the death of a 27-year-old man whose car slid into a ravine in the Belledonne mountain range.

France's Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve in a statement urged drivers "to exercise the utmost caution" and asked those who could delay their trips to do so.

The country declared an orange weather alert—one step under the maximum red alert—in 19 regional departments.

One driver stuck in his car on a freeway in the Alps with four passengers, Kevin Clavel, told AFP: "To go 130 kilometres (80 miles) it's taken us 10 hours."

Wind closes Calais port

France's meteorological services said they expected more snowfall and "significant re-freezing" overnight and warned of slippery roads.

Elsewhere in France, it was wind and not snow that wrought havoc for holiday travellers.

Storms packing gusts of up to 160 kilometres (100 miles) per hour forced the temporary closure of France's port of Calais on the English Channel and the suspension of car ferries to and from Britain.



Snow fall as cars move bumper-to-bumper along the motorway near Albertville, on December 27, 2014, as they make their way into the Tarentaise valley in the heart of the French Alps

A few kilometres outside the industrial northern city, thousands of illegal migrants living in makeshift camps struggled through a second night of freezing temperatures.

"The conditions outside are hellish in the 'jungles'," said David Lacour, the director of Solid'R, which is running a care centre to help migrants survive the cold.

"The storm blew away a lot of tents—some now have nothing."

Mattresses line the floor of the old warehouse, once used to store flowers now filled with groups of migrants, some playing cards, some sleeping, some trying to dry their soaked shoes and socks after walking for more

than an hour to get here.

Up to 2,300 migrants are thought to be in Calais and surrounding areas, where they live in flimsy tents waiting for a change to complete their final journey to Britain.

"This is a good shelter here, people help us a lot. It is difficult to survive in the 'jungle'," 23-year-old Eritrean Petrus told AFP.



A double-decker bus travels over Standedge between snow-covered fields at dusk near the village of Diggle, northern England, on December 27, 2014

Strong winds also forced the closure of the gardens of the famed chateau of Versailles near Paris.

Snow caused disruption in Britain too, leading to power shortages in

more than 100,000 homes and delays at airports.

The heaviest snow was in Leek, western central England, where 11 centimetres (4.3 inches) fell.



People put snow chains on their tires as snow falls on December 27, 2014 on the road to the Les Saisies ski resort in Savoie, central-eastern France

Flights to European destinations took off with delays from Manchester Airport, the third-biggest in Britain.

Forecasters predict that temperatures in Britain could drop as low as minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit) next week.

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Citation: Snow leaves thousands of motorists stranded in French Alps (2014, December 28)
retrieved 17 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2014-12-thousands-motorists-stranded-french-alps.html>

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