

(April 2019)

Looking Back at February and March, 2019.

Graham Brazier

As I write, I'm struggling to find the most appropriate adjective to describe the weather we experienced in February and March. I considered "unprecedented" but, as there are no records for the thousands of years that preceded the opening of the weather station at the Comox Airport in 1944, we really don't know if it was "unprecedented". "Remarkable," and "noteworthy" both seem inadequate. They were both rejected. I also rejected "awesome". Need I say why? "Extraordinary", "astonishing", and "unbelievable" seemed worthy of consideration, but, in the end, I'm unable settle on a word that adequately describes the weather we experienced in February and March of this year, so, I guess, I'll just have to rely on numbers.

Coldest

Thanks to the folks at the Comox weather station we know that February, 2019 was the coldest on record. Not the coldest of all time, but the coldest in the last 75 years. Whereas the average temperature for February over the course of the last 75 years is 7.1 degrees celsius, this year's average for February was just 3.5 degrees. In fact, the temperature only exceeded 7.1 on one occasion in February and that was on the first day of the month. It was all downhill after that. Freezing temperatures were recorded on thirteen consecutive February nights. The coldest was -9.3 degrees on February 11. Snow fell on seven consecutive days and on 12 of the 28 days of the month and it completely covered the ground from February 3 until well into March. Curiously, snowfall records were not broken. Two years ago February's snowfall was more than double this year's — 37.0 cm this year compared with 87.0 cm in 2017. But this February was colder; and it seemed endless!

Warmest

Then came March, which for the first two weeks just seemed like an extension of February, with overnight freezing temperatures recorded on 10 of the first 14 days and snow, though not falling, refusing to melt. Then, just as the prediction I made in February's issue of the *Flagstone* was looking impossible, everything changed. That prediction was: "as 2019 is expected to be an El Niño year I'm thinking (and hoping) that mid-March might be a good bet to first reach 15 degrees." In fact, it was on a warm, sunny afternoon on March 18 when the thermometer at the Comox weather station first cracked 15 degrees this year while the Denman Island Community School weather station recorded 15 degrees a day earlier on St. Patrick's Day. This achievement, though, by no means a record, is earlier than over 70% of the last 75 years.

That's not all. The Comox weather station recorded the warmest last-day-of-winter in 75 years with a temperature of 19.6 on March 20. On the same day the Denman Island Community School thermometer exceeded a reading 21 degrees. And there were still patches of snow on the ground! 21 degrees with snow on the ground! Is this "unprecedented"? We'll never know for sure.

Nevertheless, while it seems that words are not enough, I doubt that numbers do justice to encapsulating the weather of February and March of 2019 either, and for that we might just have to rely on our memory. Maybe "memorable" is the word I was looking for in the first place. After all, memory is, at least, potentially richer than either words or numbers.

^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^