

*Heatwaves are **NOTHING NEW***

Below are extracts from newspapers describing 21 heat waves in Australia from 1886 to 1932.

*All information obtained from TROVE www.trove.nla.gov.au
Digitised Newspapers.
The TROVE search used - 'great heat in the past'.*

Compiled by Rick Dean, January 2014

Note: All of these old temperatures are recorded on the Fahrenheit Scale. On this scale, the freezing point of water was 32 DegF and the boiling point of water was 212 DegF.

A few other key reference points are:

*100 DegF = 37.8 DegC
104 DegF = 40 DegC
113 DegF = 45 DegC
114 DegF = 45.6 DegC
120 DegF = 48.9 DegC
128 DegF = 53.3 DegC
130 DegF = 54.4 DegC*

THE GREAT HEAT WAVE OF 1896 – Max 128DegF (53.3 DegC)

114 degrees at Bourke for period of six weeks, maximum of 128 degrees

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/46050184>

In 1895 at Bourke there were 66 deaths from heat apoplexy over a period of six weeks, during which time the heat was never under 114 degrees shade heat and, what was worse, never under 100 degrees at night. The maximum temperature recorded under true shade conditions was 128 degrees.

Visualise the heat! Never under 100 degrees for six weeks, day or night.

Apoplexy stricken persons fall down on the footpaths. Hansom cabs patrolled the streets. They were laden with ice. When a subject fell over he was placed in the cab. Ice was packed around him and he was rushed to the hospital. At the hospital the victim of the heat was placed in a room full of ice. His pillow was an ice block, and ice was packed all round him, and nurses undressed him after that. Hundreds were saved in this way.

But outside of Bourke there was no such relief. When a man gets heat apoplexy he becomes un-normal. He sheds his clothes at intervals until he is naked, all the while walking round in circles. That is why many of the victims of the 1896 heat wave in the Bourke district were found entangled in rabbit-proof fences. Or rather, what was discovered was their skeletons. The women and children of Bourke in that year had an awful experience. Sleep was impossible. Families walked the streets the whole night in negligible clothing. Many went into the Darling River and stayed there for hours up to their necks, but the water was lukewarm. It gave no relief. Mr Macdougall, manager of the Pera Bore Experimental Farm, was discovered dead in his bed. The thermometer on his wall at 10 o'clock at night disclosed that the temperature was 130 degrees. Finally the Government of the day granted free railway passes to women and children to go to cooler climates.

Sydney 15th January, 1896, 131 degrees in the shade. (55 DegC)

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/109918874>

The extreme heat experienced in Sydney and the colony generally during the past two days, and especially on Monday last, formed the leading topic of conversation, and the oldest resident could not remember ever having before felt it so hot. Heaton's 'Dictionary of Dates' (1879) contains some interesting figures with regard to extreme heat in the colony, and, according to that authority, Monday's heat was not unprecedented. A table of thermometer readings shows that on January 10 and 11, 1791, according to Colonel Collins, it was 105deg in the shade, and on a date in December not given, seven years later, it was 107deg in the shade on the Hawkesbury. No great heat seems to have prevailed until some twenty-eight years later — or, if it did, there is no record of it— for on November 29, 1826, we find that it was 104deg in the shade. February, 1833, seems to have been a warm month, as it is recorded that it was 105deg to 107 ½ deg in the sun for several days, but on January 31, 1835, it was hotter in Sydney than it was on Monday, for on that day the thermometer of the time registered 109 in the shade. The record for heat in Australia was made ten years later, for, according to Sturt, the thermometer registered 131 in the shade in Central Australia on January 21, 1845. The 11th of the following November was also extremely hot, the same authority stating in the same part of the continent it was 127 in the shade. According to the Rev. A. Glennie's journal, the year 1848 opened very hot, for on January 1 it was 108 in the shade, and the heat must have been continuous, for on January 3 we find that the mercury was a degree higher. This weather was experienced in the Patterson. January 5, 1863, in Sydney, according to Mr. Glennie, was just such a day as Monday week, the glass showing 106.9 in the shade, while on January 8, 1866, it showed 108 at Lochinvar. January 3, 1870, Mr. Russell, the Government Astronomer, states, was an exceedingly warm day. 105.2 being registered. On November 21 it was 102.5 in the shade, but it was so hot in the sun that the glass burst, and the temperature must have been over 131 to have caused that. An authority states that on February 10 and 11, 1791, on which days the temperature at Sydney stood in the shade at 105, the heat was so excessive at Parramatta that immense numbers of large fox-bats were seen to drop from the trees into the water, and many dropped dead on the wing. At Sydney about the harbor in many places the ground was found covered with small birds, some dead, others gasping for water. The wind was north-west, and burnt up everything before it. Persons whose business compelled them to go out declared that it was impossible to turn the face for five minutes to the wind. The 'Sydney Gazette,' November 29, 1826, stated that 'the heat and hot wind of Saturday last excelled all that we have ever experienced in the colony.' On board the Volage, man-o'-war, in the shade the thermometer was 106, and in several parts of the town was 100 and 104. To traverse the streets was simply dreadful; the dust rose in thick columns, and the north-west wind was assisted in its heat by the surrounding country being all on fire, so that those who were compelled to travel felt themselves encircled with lambent flames. Sydney was more like the mouth of Vesuvius than anything else. The 'Sydney Gazette,' Tuesday, February 21, 1832, stated that Saturday was one of the hottest days ever remembered; the recent rains having saturated the earth, the atmosphere was pregnated by an aqueous vapor, not unlike steam issuing from a boiler, while the sun poured down all the fury of his heat. Man and beast groaned beneath the oppression, and a number of working oxen dropped down dead in the public roads. Captain Sturt, speaking of the hot day of November 11, 1845, said. 'The wind which had been blowing all the morning hot from the north-east, increased to a gale, and I shall never forget the withering effects. I sought shelter behind a large gum tree, but the blast of the heat was so terrific that I wondered the very grass did not take fire. Everything, both animate and inanimate, gave way before it. The horses stood with their backs to the wind and their noses to the ground, the birds were mute, and the leaves of the trees fell like a shower around us. At noon I took out my thermometer, graduated to 127 degrees, and put it in the fork of a tree, and an hour afterwards, when I went to examine it, the tube was full of mercury and the bulb burst. On the Lower Macquarie River, on January 11, 1878, it was 117 in the shade, and on January 18, a week later, the thermometer registered 119 in the shade.

Phenomenal Heat Wave in NSW, 1896, record heat, bushfires rage.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/126294191>

Great heat has been experienced on the Richmond during the past week or two, but judging by telegrams received from other parts, the effects in other districts have been far more severe.

The record heat was recorded in Sydney on Monday, when the thermometer at the Observatory registered 108.5 in the shade. Three deaths occurred on that day in Sydney and suburbs, due to the intense heat, and many were recorded from different parts of the colony.

Camden reported the shade temperature 123, and the average temperature for three days 112deg.

A little girl died at Mount Hope as a result of the excessive heat there.

A child who had been sent from Sydney to escape the excessive heat died at Lawson from that cause.

From Goulburn it is reported that eight infants have died during the week from causes attributable to the excessive heat.

At Wellington a little boy, aged 11, died from the effects of sunstroke received during the prevailing excessive heat.

William Clarke, landlord of the Royal Hotel, Singleton, died on Monday morning from heat apoplexy.

From Bourke the deaths of eight adults and two infants were reported as the result of the continued excessive heat.

Since the beginning of the year 10 infants have died at Albury from the excessive heat; four of the victims being buried on Monday.

A man was found dead near the Moonie River, in the Collarendabri district. He had evidently perished from thirst.

Three deaths were recorded at Broken Hill.

At Wilcannia the shade heat was 119, and after sunset 104. Several serious cases of sunstroke occurred.

Several infants succumbed at Penrith to the great heat.

A man named John McCosker died from heat apoplexy.

Bush fires are raging and have done a vast amount of damage in the Wollongong, Molong, and many other districts.

Monday was the hottest day ever experienced throughout the colony.

Great heat in New South Wales, December 25, 1896, 116 DegF (46.7 DegC)

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/54477293>

Reports from the country to-day announce great heat everywhere, due to prevalence of strong northerly winds. At Bourke this morning at half-past 8 the temperature was 98 in the shade; at 11 it was 108 ; at 1, 113; and at half-past 3 it had reached 116. Mr. H. C. Russell, the Government Astronomer, predicts the continuance of dry hot weather.

Riverton, January 4, 1886, Fatal Case of Heat Apoplexy. Death of Captain Sweet.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/93850349>

Captain Sweet, the well-known photographer, died of heat apoplexy this morning, at Halldale, near here. He was attended by Dr. Allwork, and everything possible was done for him. Great regret is felt at the occurrence. The heat for some days past has been very oppressive registering up to 113 in the shade.

1891, Intense Heat in Queensland, 113 DegF in Winton (45 DegC).

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/115567284>

The weather recently in Queensland has been intensely oppressive. The maximum shade temperature registered at the Observatory on Tuesday was 96, Monday and Sunday it was 93, and the average for the past week was 91, which is considerably higher than the record for some years past. The heat in the inland districts has been very great. At Winton on Monday, 113 was registered.

Excessive Heat, 124 DegF in the Shade, Sydney, Friday, 1892. (51.1 DegC)

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/82446753>,

Great heat has been reported from various parts of the colony during the past few days. At Balranald yesterday the registration was 124 DegF in the shade.

Intense Heat in Melbourne, Victoria, March 8, 1892

Intercolonial news (Tasmanian press association by submarine cable.)

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/39459724>

The heat to-day was intense, the thermometer registering 102deg. in the shade and 153deg. in the sun at the Observatory. It has been the hottest day experienced in the month of March for the past ten years. The country districts report great heat with extensive bush fires.

Excessive Heat in Goulburn, 1897

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/104547982>

Excessive heat has prevailed in Goulburn for the past three days. On Thursday it was 102.8 in the shade, on Friday 103, and at 2.30 today the register was 103.8. The heat is being felt very keenly on account of the oppressiveness of the nights. It was over 102 at noon to-day.

Excessive Heat Perth 1897, a December record, 110 DegF (43.3 DegC).

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/66700807>

The present month bids fair to be the hottest December on record. During the past 18 days the average daily temperature has been over 94deg. in the shade. The thermometer has been rising by great leaps during the last four days, and to-day, reached 110 in the shade. This is the hottest Proclamation Day on record, while the almost continuous heat experienced during the past fortnight has for December no parallel in the colony's records.

Great Heat at Bourke, 1901, 112 DegF for 8 days (44.4 DegC)

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/10535895>

The recent heat wave has caused a lot of sickness in Bourke, and one of the local doctors succumbed to heat apoplexy. The thermometer showed an average of 112deg in the shade for eight days. Water in the town is beginning to be very scarce. As showing the dreadful condition of the country around Bourke, 450,000 head of starving stock have been trucked from Bourke to other districts during the past 12 months.

Extraordinary Heat in NSW, several deaths reported, Sydney, January 5, 1903.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/24851907>

The excessive heat in the country during the past few days has, in addition to scorching the grass and seriously affecting the maize crops, caused great mortality, especially among infants. In Casino, in the Richmond River district, the thermometer registered on Saturday and yesterday 115 degrees in the shade (46.1 DegC). No fewer than ten deaths, as a result of the heat, took place. At Coraki a man was found dead on the road. He had been overpowered by the hot weather.

Great Heat In Perth, Thursday, 8 March 1906, 104.3 DegF

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/44493746>

The shade temperature in Perth yesterday was 104.3 degrees. This is the highest temperature for the past 15 months, and the highest for March since records were taken.

Great Heat in NSW, February 18, 1906.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/25632741>

Great heat has been experienced in the country during the past few days. No fewer than 50 stations reported shade temperature of 100deg. or over yesterday.

Great Heat in Sydney, 1909. 113.2 DegF at Strathfield (45 DegC)

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/72204483>

Yesterday was the hottest day recorded in Sydney during the past 50 years. The heat was stifling all day, and at 3 o'clock the glass registered 104 degrees of heat. In the western suburbs the heat was intense all day. Strathfield registered 113.2 degrees at noon. To-day the temperature in Sydney reached 99 degrees. At Parramatta it was 118 degrees. Two old-age pensioners collapsed with the heat while waiting for the payment of their pensions.

Records of Past Heat waves, compiled in 1909.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/15024975>

In view of the severity of the great heat wave which has been passing over the State, it may be interesting to recall some of the records of the past. The data in the possession of the Weather Bureau contain the following:—

Bourke, Jan., 1877, 127 DegF (52.8 DegC)

Deniliquin, Jan., 1878, 121 DegF

Balranald, Feb., 1886, 125.8 DegF

Euston, Dec., 1897, 124.8

Brewarrina, Jan., 1896, 122

Heat in Sydney, 1912.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/117809011>

There was great heat in the city to day, the temperature reaching 99 degrees in the shade. The city thoroughfares were veritable infernos. This temperature has only been exceeded twelve times during the past 53 years in November. The heat is general throughout the State, many places reporting over 100 degrees.

More Than Hot, Broken Hill, February 5 1915.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/124919491>

The temperature at Broken Hill today was 112.8 degrees. Wind and dust came up this evening.

The thermometer at Yancannia registered 127 degrees to-day. That at Momba showed 122 degrees. The record was established at White Cliffs, where the heat is said to have been 129 degrees (53.9 DegC).

A Hot Day - was it 130 degrees? Melbourne, February 23. 1925

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/43274746>

No confirmation of the reported registration of 130 degree in the shade at Boulia, Queensland, on Saturday, has been received. This is three degrees above the highest temperature recorded previously in Australia. The highest known was 127 degrees at Bourke, New South Wales, on January 16, 1877.

Brisbane Feb 22, 1925; Ipswich, Feb 23rd, 1925, Boulia 130 DegF (54.4 DegC)

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/121943656>

Deaths from heat, men, women, animals collapse, many fires break out in metropolis. Temperature reported 130 degrees at Boulia, church blown down, many buildings wrecked.

It is reported that six deaths occurred in Brisbane on Saturday, as a result of the heat. There were many collapses, both of people and stock. Many working horses and cattle died in different parts of the city. Several fires occurred, due to spontaneous combustion. The highest record temperature in the month of February, 105 degrees, with a humidity of 47 degrees, was reached in the metropolis. A disastrous cyclone passed over the town on Saturday night. A Roman Catholic Church was blown down, and a child, inside, seriously injured. The Soldiers' Memorial Hall was wrecked, a store partly unroofed, many private houses moved on their blocks, and slightly strained, and the side of a picture theatre blown down. Three deaths are reported at Boulia, where it is rumoured that the temperature was 130 degrees in the shade.

BRISBANE, February 22, 1925.

The intense heat which prevailed on Saturday was responsible for deaths and collapses of a number of citizens, besides stock, while several fires and false alarms also were also ported. Mrs. Caroline Chester, of Mt. Gravatt; .Mrs. Elizabeth Hannam, South Brisbane; James Crawford, of Chelmer; and Thomas Delohrey, all collapsed and died during the day. The ambulance was also called on to attend other cases of collapses in different parts of the city. Three fires occurred almost simultaneously on Montague road at midday, all due to spontaneous combustion, but the out breaks were extinguished before any very serious damage was done.

During Saturday and Saturday night 20 cattle, which had arrived at Enoggera saleyards for sale, succumbed to the intense heat, while it is reported by the police that about eight working horses have died in different parts of the city during the past couple of days. The most serious fire loss appears to have been the destruction of a six roomed house at Morningside along with the whole contents of the residence, which was occupied by a war widow, Mrs. Sarah Rose; on Saturday night, during the absence of Mrs. Rose at the pictures. The outbreak is believed to be due to the explosion of a bottle of petrol. No less than five automatic fire alarms in the city business establishments were set going on Saturday by the intense heat and the fire brigade, as well as the ambulance, had a busy time. It was an extremely trying day for workers at the civic polling booths. Many womenfolk assisting the various candidates fainted. Throughout the city, both on Saturday and Sunday, there was an acute shortage of ice, due to abnormal demand. The temperature at noon yesterday was 101.2deg., the maximum being at 1.40 pm with 105.7deg. This is the highest ever recorded in the metropolis during the month of February. After a week of intense heat, averaging 102 degrees, a most disastrous cyclone passed over the town last night. A Roman Catholic church was blown down, while there were two children in the building. One girl, Miss Tennyson, was seriously injured, but the other girl escaped with bruises. The soldiers' Memorial Hall was wrecked while the roof of Selman's store was partly blown away. Many private houses were moved slightly and strained, while the side of a picture theatre was blown out. Post office officials were busy repairing telephone wires. Three deaths are reported at Boulia, where J. Fitzgerald, Mrs. Lilley, and W. T. Weigh died from excessive heat. A rumour was current that locally the temperature at Boulia was 130 degrees in the shade.

Great Heat Prevails at Broome, 1928.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/79227569>

Writing to a friend in Perth (the letter coming by aerial mail) a resident of Broome said that they were experiencing the worst heat bout remembered for the past fifteen to twenty years. Although the shade temperature was only in the vicinity of 96 degrees, the percentage of humidity was often higher than the heat figure. The result was that everyone lived in a continual bath of perspiration, and even as he wrote the letter in question he had to keep a towel under his arm to save spoiling the paper. The heat and humidity had been so intense during the past week that they had been unable to get about between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., and any business that was necessary had to be transacted before or after those times. Any house which because of its position commanded the slightest breath of wind was at a premium, and the heat had been so intense that they were no longer troubled with flies or mosquitoes. All had apparently died.

Heat Wave In NSW, Jan 9, 1929, 106.2 deg In Sydney (41 DegC).

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/94375703>

Sydney experienced a heat wave to-day. The shade temperature reached 106.2 degrees at half-past 2 o'clock. The heat was mainly due to meteorological conditions being accentuated by the development of a southern disturbance of great energy over the south-eastern parts of Australia, combined with a tropical depression in Queensland, which has caused strong south-westerly winds over the greater part of New South Wales. Scrub and grass fires in the suburbs also contributed to the heat.

119.4 Deg. at Port Augusta (48 DegC)

Heat Stops Quarry Work Port Augusta, January 27 1932.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/29888476>

Today's maximum temperature was 119.4 degrees. At Tarcoola men ceased work following three days in which the readings were 103, 105, 112.

Today's heat was generally believed to be a record, but old newspaper files revealed that in January, 1884, a heat wave of a fortnight culminated in a reading of 128 degrees for three consecutive days. It is reported that at noon the temperature in the Commonwealth Railways stone quarries at Tarcoola reached 146 degrees.

This report was compiled by Rick Dean and edited by Viv Forbes.
Send any comments or questions to info@carbon-sense.com