

Capital Weather Gang

Freak storm in North Atlantic to lash UK, may push temperatures over 50 degrees above normal at North Pole

By **Jason Samenow** December 28, 2015

[Update: Cyclone pushes North Pole to freezing mark, 50 degrees above normal](#)

The vigorous low pressure system that helped spawn devastating tornadoes in the Dallas area on Saturday is forecast to explode into a monstrous storm over Iceland by Wednesday.

[\[Nature's startling contrast: Tornadoes torment Texas; Blizzard buries New Mexico\]](#)

Big Icelandic storms are common in winter, but this one may rank among the strongest and will draw northward an incredible surge of warmth pushing temperatures at the North Pole over 50 degrees above normal. This is mind-boggling.

And the storm will batter the United Kingdom, reeling from recent flooding, with another round of rain and wind.

Computer model simulations show the storm, sweeping across the north central Atlantic today, rapidly intensifying along a jet stream ripping above the ocean at 230 mph.

The storm's pressure is forecast by the GFS model to plummet more than 50 millibars in 24 hours between Monday night and Tuesday night, easily meeting the criteria of a 'bomb cyclone' (a drop in pressure of at least 24 mb in 24 hours),

By Wednesday morning, when the storm reaches Iceland and nears maximum strength, its minimum pressure is forecast to be near 923 mb, [which would rank among the great storms of the North Atlantic](#). (Note: there is some uncertainty as to how much it will intensify. The European model only drops the minimum pressure to around 936 mb, which is strong but not that unusual). Winds of hurricane force are likely to span hundreds of miles in the North Atlantic.

Environmental blogger [Robert Scribbler notes](#) this storm will be linked within a "daisy chain" of two other powerful North Atlantic low pressure systems forming a "truly extreme storm system." He adds: "The Icelandic coast and near off-shore regions are expected to see heavy precipitation hurled over the island by 90 to 100 mile per hour or stronger winds raging out of 35-40 foot seas. Meanwhile, the UK will find itself in the grips of an extraordinarily

strong southerly gale running over the backs of 30 foot swells.”

The [UK Met Office cautions](#) “a swathe of gale and severe gale force winds” may blast parts of the west and northern UK while heavy rains, capable of flooding, drench western and northern Britain. Parts of England, Scotland and Wales are only now recovering from [“very serious flooding” over the weekend](#).

Ahead of the storm, the surge of warm air making a beeline towards the North Pole is astonishing. In the animation below, watch the warm temperature departures from normal, portrayed by red shades, explode towards the Pole between Monday and Wednesday.

It’s as if a bomb went off. And, in fact, it did. The exploding storm acts a remarkably efficient heat engine, drawing warm air from the tropics to the top of the Earth.

The GFS model projects the temperature at the North Pole to reach near freezing or 32 degrees early Wednesday. Consider the average winter temperature there is around 20 degrees below zero. If the temperature rises to freezing, it would signify a departure from normal of over 50 degrees.

Scribbler says such an anomaly “reeks of a human-forced warming of the Earth’s climate”, although [some climate scientists aren’t convinced](#) global warming is meaningfully impacting these types of storms.

The abrupt warming at high latitudes triggered by this event is forecast to shift the Arctic Oscillation more towards a negative phase, which will favor colder air in the mid-latitudes of North America and Europe in early January.

Update at 10 p.m.: There is conflicting information about what the average temperature at the North Pole is at this time of year. [An educational website run by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute](#) indicates it is -40 degrees. However, meteorologist [Ryan Maue indicates](#) a re-analysis dataset suggests it is closer to -20 degrees (-29 Celsius). This story has been updated based on the assumption the average temperature is around -20 degrees, meaning the departure from average as a result of this storm would be over 50 degrees (as opposed to 70 degrees as stated when published initially).

Jason is the Washington Post’s weather editor and Capital Weather Gang's chief meteorologist. He earned a master's degree in atmospheric science, and spent 10 years as a climate change science analyst for the U.S. government. He holds the Digital Seal of Approval from the National Weather Association.

Before I knew my daughter was gay, I let her girlfriend spend the night

I wasn't a super strict parent, but I never would have given permission for my daughter to have a sleepover with a 16-year-old boy. Why would I be okay with her having a girlfriend stay? I thought about the differences.

A black American man is applying for refugee status in Canada, citing police racism. Don't laugh.

It's not quite as ridiculous as you might think.

Obama's skin looks a little different in these GOP campaign ads

A new study analyzes spots from the 2008 presidential campaign and reaches a provocative conclusion.

At a Glance

Sun.	Mon.	Tue.
- /49°	32° /38°	26° /34°

Wed.

Thu.

Fri.

24° /43°

32° /48°

39° /49°
50%

Forecast by National Weather Service

National Airport

BWI

Dulles

Right Now

34.0

(1.1° C)

Weather A Few Clouds

Wind West at 3.5
mph

**Dew
Point** 28.0 F

Pressure 1013.3 mb

Last updated: Jan 3, 2016,
6:52 am EST

Washington, D.C., Snow Tracker

Current Snow Total 0"

Record Most Snow 56.1"
(2009-10)

Record Least Snow 0.1"
(1997-98, 1972-73)

Last Winter's Snow Total
18.3"

[Winter Outlook](#) ➞

[Tweets by @capitalweather](#)

D.C. Area Almanac

January ▼



National
Dulles BWI

Avg

High

43

42

42

Avg

Low

28

23

24

Rec

High

(2004) 68

(2000) 68

(2000) 68

Rec

Low

(1877) 3

(1979) 8

(1879) 9

Sunrise

7:26

am

7:28

am

7:25

am

Sunset

4:59

pm

5:00

pm

4:57

pm

°F

°C