

Extraordinary Warmth Shatters Records at Waterloo

by Jim Lee and Craig Cogil

Unusually warm weather that has prevailed across Iowa since last autumn intensified in March with unprecedented temperatures annihilating records at most locations in the state. The following is a summary of some of the records that have been broken at Waterloo not only in March, but over the course of the winter and spring so far. Temperature records at Waterloo date back to February of 1895.

Last month was by far the warmest March on record. The average temperature of 51.1 bested the old record of 46.8 (set in 1910) by 4.3 degrees. This is the widest margin by which a monthly temperature record has ever been broken at Waterloo, besting November 2001 which was the warmest on record by a margin of 4.2 degrees. In fact, the average temperature for March was so far above normal that it would rank 24th on the list of the warmest Aprils on record.

The number of warm days in March was completely unprecedented in the climate record. The last freeze of the month occurred on the 13th, with the remaining 18 days of the month breaking the record for the most consecutive March days above freezing, which was previously 14 days set in 1910. The temperature rose to 70 degrees or higher on 14 days in March, besting the previous record of 12 days set in 1910, and rose to 80 degrees or higher on 4 days, topping the record of 3 days set in 1907, 1945, and 1986. In fact prior to this year the earliest occurrence in the year of an 80 degree reading at Waterloo was March 21st in 1907 and 1938, but on this year that mark was reached on four consecutive days from March 16-19.

The warmth on the seven days from March 16-22 of this year was historic, with the average temperature of 66.6 degrees being nearly 30 degrees above normal for that week. In fact this was the warmest week ever recorded at Waterloo in the months of November through March, crushing the previous record of 62.9 degrees set from March 23-29 in 1910. The earliest week of the spring to achieve a higher average temperature occurred nearly a month later, from April 15-21 in 1985.

The warmest day of the month came on March 18th when the high temperature was 81 degrees, the low was 62, and the average temperature was 71.5. Previously a low in the 60s had never been recorded in March, and it occurred on both the 18th and again on the 19th when the low was 61 degrees. These stand as the two warmest March daily low temperatures on record at Waterloo. Likewise, the average temperature of 71.5 degrees makes March 18, 2012 the warmest March day on record at Waterloo, besting the previous record of 70.5 degrees set on March 25, 2007.

As mentioned above, record-breaking warmth was most intense in March but has actually prevailed for much of the time since last autumn. Waterloo is experiencing its warmest year-to-date (January through March) on record with an average temperature of 34.8 degrees, besting the previous record of 32.7 degrees set in 1921. There have been 21 days so far this year on which the temperature has reached 60 degrees or higher, breaking the previous record of 17 days set in 1945.

Daily Records Broken

Record Maximum Temperature

March 10	67	Broke Previous Record of 66 set in 1967
March 14	77	Broke Previous Record of 71 set in 1995
March 15	79	Broke Previous Record of 73 set in 1935
March 16	82	Broke Previous Record of 77 set in 1930
March 17	82	Broke Previous Record of 78 set in 2003
March 18	81	Broke Previous Record of 77 set in 1918
March 19	80	Broke Previous Record of 78 set in 1921

Record High Minimum Temperature

March 12	47	Tied Previous Record also set in 1990
March 14	50	Broke Previous Record of 47 set in 1973
March 17	59	Broke Previous Record of 45 set in 1966
March 18	62	Broke Previous Record of 49 set in 1903
March 19	61	Broke Previous Record of 59 set in 1921
March 20	57	Broke Previous Record of 47 set in 1921
March 21	59	Broke Previous Record of 50 set in 1938
March 22	54	Broke Previous Record of 45 set in 1938
March 23	50	Broke Previous Record of 49 set in 1907