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North grinds to a halt as winter comes storming in

Weather red alert as 165mph winds damage buildings and flooding brings chaos to roads

The British Isles were lashed by the worst storms in years yesterday, with many parts of the UK forced to shut down by hurricane-strength winds.

Roofs were blown from houses and shopfronts torn apart in Scotland, as gusts reached up to 165mph at the peaks of the Cairngorms – the highest windspeed in Britain since 173mph was recorded at the same spot in 1986.

The north saw the worst of the weather. Every major bridge in Scotland was closed after a red alert was issued by the Met Office. One wind turbine in north Ayrshire was so overworked that it caught fire, sending a stream of flames and sparks from the centre of its rotor. And in Glasgow and Aberdeen not a single school dared open its doors.

Though less severe south of the border, winds gusted at up to 100mph. Cross-Channel ferry services were disrupted by force 10 gales, while in Cumbria an articulated lorry was blown on to its side. Two people had to be rescued by an RAF helicopter after their car was swept into a swollen river in North Yorkshire. Meanwhile in Hull, 300 ferry passengers were left stranded at sea for most of the day, as fears that the vessel could be damaged while docking delayed them disembarking for nine hours. Across the country, around 50,000 people were left without power for parts of the day.

The weather caused excitement among meteorologists, with two scientists from the University of Reading taking to the skies to fly through the cyclone yesterday evening. Dr Laura Baker and Dr John Methven said they believed the UK was witnessing a rare example of a "sting jet cyclone", similar to that which battered Britain in the Great Storm of 1987. Their plan was to drop probes into the clouds to help find out what causes these types of storms.

12,000

The number of homes left without power in Perthshire.