



Meteorological chart for noon, December 23. © Times Newspapers Ltd.

part of an overall pattern which produced snow in Southern Spain, where in some places it was the first December snow for over a decade, while the Scottish ski resorts found what little snow they had melting in unusually warm sunshine. But although this bizarre situation does not often arise, it is not unusual for winter conditions to be more extreme in south east England than in the north of Scotland.

Because of the widening of the North Sea with higher latitude, Scotland has a climate more typically maritime, and hence less subject to sudden changes in temperature, than that of southern England. The situation which produced the Christmas snow was caused by a large anticyclone which moved from the Atlantic over Scotland. Cold air curling round this high pressure area travelled over Scandinavia and northern Russia before moving towards England over the North Sea, appearing as an easterly or a north easterly wind. The airstream arrived in England still cold enough for precipitation to fall as snow, but it had picked up enough heat from the North Sea to be warmed above freezing point by the time it reached Scotland.

The Meteorological Office was, however, caught on the wrong foot by the sudden thaw early this week, which occurred just as the forecasters were predicting more snow. In this case, the dominant feature in the weather pattern was a low pressure area moving northwards across Europe. Unluckily for the forecasters, the actual windspeed turned out to be rather lower than they predicted and the cold air warmed sufficiently during its passage over the sea to thaw out all except the extreme south eastern tip of England.

Just before Christmas, the unusually warm autumn had left the North Sea a

full degree centigrade warmer than usual for the time of year. All of this surplus heat store was lost during the curious behaviour of the last ten days, so that the overall picture now looks more typical for Europe and the North Sea in winter, making future predictions somewhat easier.

NRDC

New Man at the Helm

THE National Research Development Corporation has at last appointed a new managing director. The post, which has been vacant since the resignation of Mr John Duckworth in July 1970, is to be filled by Dr Basil Bard, an industrial chemist, and chairman of Advanced Materials Engineering Ltd. The corporation has been advertising for a new managing director in the national newspapers during the past six months, and has had some 150 applicants. But, ironically, the appointment of Dr Bard has been made from the inside—he has been a member of NRDC's board of directors since 1956, and he is chief executive of the corporation's Department of Applied Science.

The delay in appointing a new managing director can be explained in part by uncertainty about the future for the NRDC. The green paper on government research, published a year ago by Mr Anthony Wedgwood Benn when he was Minister of Technology, suggested that the corporation should form part of the proposed British Research Development Corporation, but the change of government last June inevitably means that many of the proposals outlined in the green paper will not be put into effect. Until the government outlines its policies for

government research, the position of NRDC remains uncertain, but it seems that there will be little change in its structure in the near future. The corporation has shown a small profit on its revenue account during the past two years, thanks chiefly to sales of the antibiotic cephalosporin, and the future for Tracked Hovercraft Ltd, a subsidiary of NRDC, looks bright.

SOVIET UNION

New Science Centre

from our Soviet Correspondent

A FAR EASTERN Science Centre of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR is being formed from existing scientific institutions in the Soviet Far East. The centre, which is to specialize in research connected with the natural resources and economic needs of the area, will serve a region stretching from the permafrost of the Arctic tundra, down to the subtropical forests of Sikhote-Alin' and from the Amur and Assuri rivers to the Pacific coast.

The centre's headquarters will be in Vladivostok, where institutes of geology, soil biology, marine biology, and biologically active substances have already been established. The centre will also incorporate the existing institutes in Khabarovsk, Magadan and on Sakhalin Island, and the Institute of Vulcanology in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, which is engaged on field research on active volcanoes.

According to the articles of its foundation, this new centre will undertake "basic research in the natural and social sciences, the working out of scientific problems facilitating the more rapid development of the economy and productive forces of the Far East, the training of qualified scientific personnel and the coordination of scientific research undertaken by the institutes of the various ministries and departments situated in the Far East".

Writing in more practical terms, Academician A. P. Vinogradov, vice president of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (*Pravda*, no. 352; 1970), emphasizes the importance to the programme of the centre of investigations of the bed of the Pacific, the study of the volcano belt and ore zones, including the investigation of the effect of the magma on tectonic and ore-producing processes. New surveys are to be undertaken, to find further ore seams and oil-gas deposits, and for this purpose an institute of geology and tectonics is being organized in Khabarovsk. It is also hoped to carry out a large-scale study of the geography and economics of the whole area. Institutes of physics and chemistry should also be established in the near future.