

Annual 2003 Weather Capsule

Back to Back Wet Years on the Suncoast ...While Seasonal Temperature Swings "Add Up" to Normal

Calendar year 2003 featured a variety of weather fluctuations, but few instances of widespread hazards. For the second consecutive year, area rainfall was above normal with few exceptions. Portions of Hernando, Pasco, Citrus, and Sumter were above too much above normal in each year; however, the main difference in 2003 was that heavy rain and flood episodes occurred more toward the coast. In fact, rainfall was above too much above normal along the entire Suncoast from Citrus to Lee County.

The year began cold and dry, with January ranking among the coldest and driest on record. February recovered nicely, with seasonal temperatures. Rainfall increased everywhere, but was generally below normal south of Tampa Bay and above normal north of Tampa Bay. Spring began with a warm and humid March, as above normal rainfall clinched a wet cool season (October 2002 through March 2003).

Interestingly, the available surface water, along with a slightly warmer than normal atmospheric pattern, may have contributed to nocturnal anomalies, producing average low temperatures which were nearly 6 degrees above normal in some areas. April was rather non-descript, save for a line of torrential-rain producing storms late on the 25th which produced flash flooding in southern Pinellas County. The warm, humid pattern returned in May, with nighttime minimum temperatures averaging nearly 4 degrees above normal in some locations.

A quiet start to June soon gave way to summer's torrents, with deep southwesterly flow making frequent appearances, in each case drenching portions of the Suncoast with flooding rainfall. June featured a five-day soaking around mid month; a similar five-day event pummeled the coast between August 7th and 11th, and Tropical Storm Henri put an exclamation point on the rainy season's soaking in Hernando, Charlotte, and Lee Counties. The wetter than normal pattern held average temperatures a bit below normal for this period.

The faucet turned off in October, as drier air returned. Generally dry and warm weather prevailed through this portion of Autumn. Rainfall was largely below normal; November ranked as 10th warmest since 1890 in Tampa. Despite the drying trend, subsurface water remained above minimum levels within the Floridian Aquifer.

November went out like a lion, as the first substantial cold front of Autumn brought freezing temperatures to portions of the Nature Coast on the 30th. December fared cool and a shade wetter than normal, with locally heavy rains on the 14th followed a week later by the first widespread freeze, which brought temperatures down between 20 and 25 across inland sections of the Nature Coast.

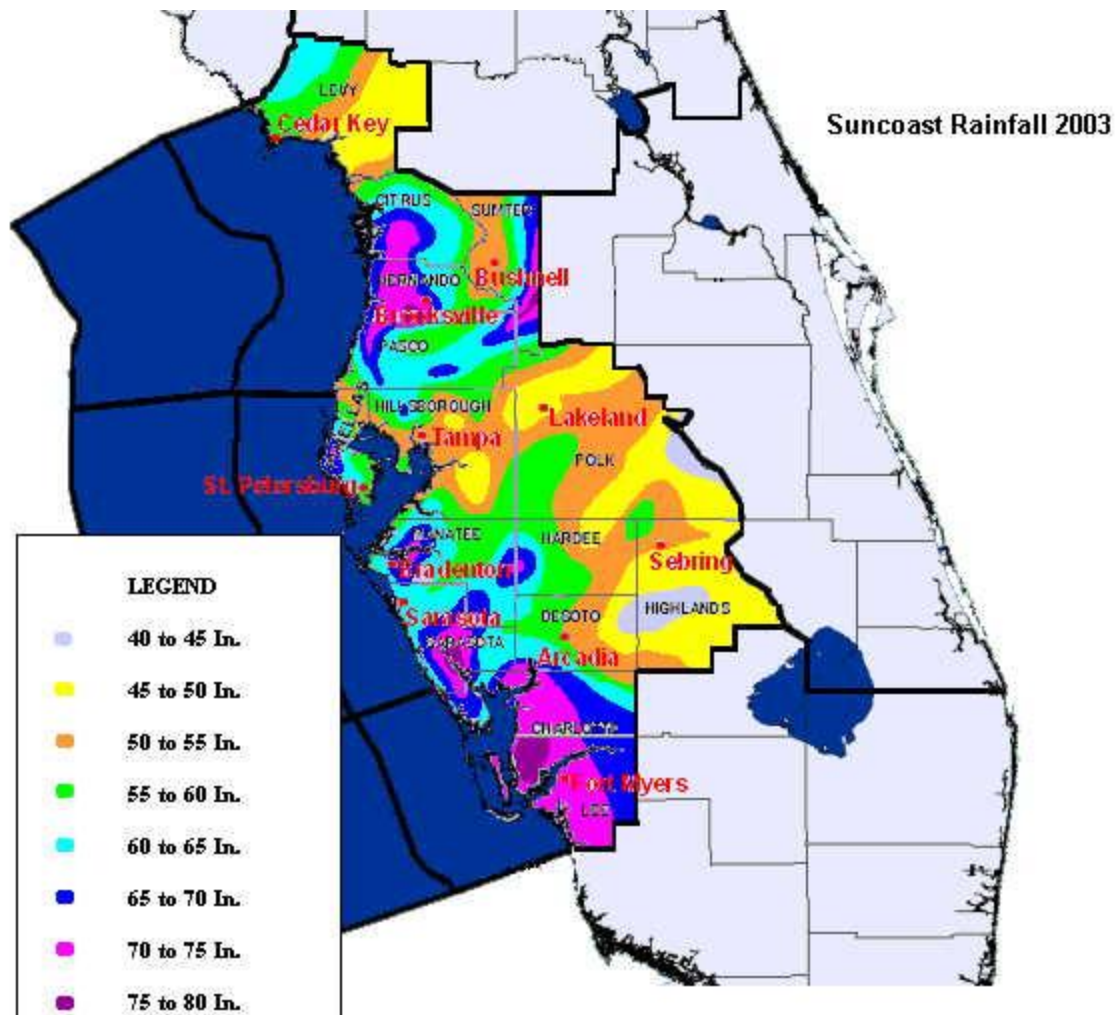


Figure 1. Total rainfall, 2003.

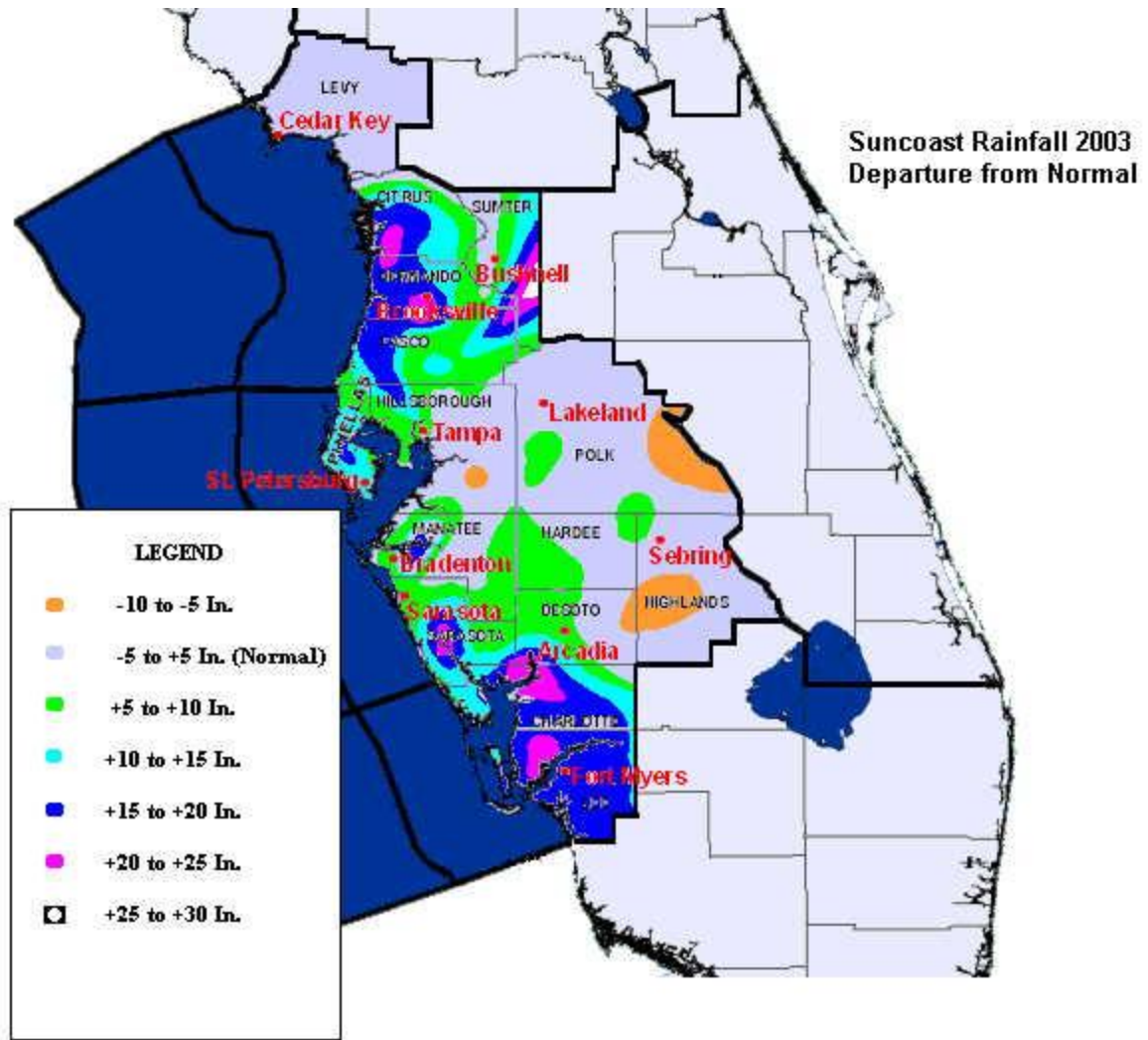
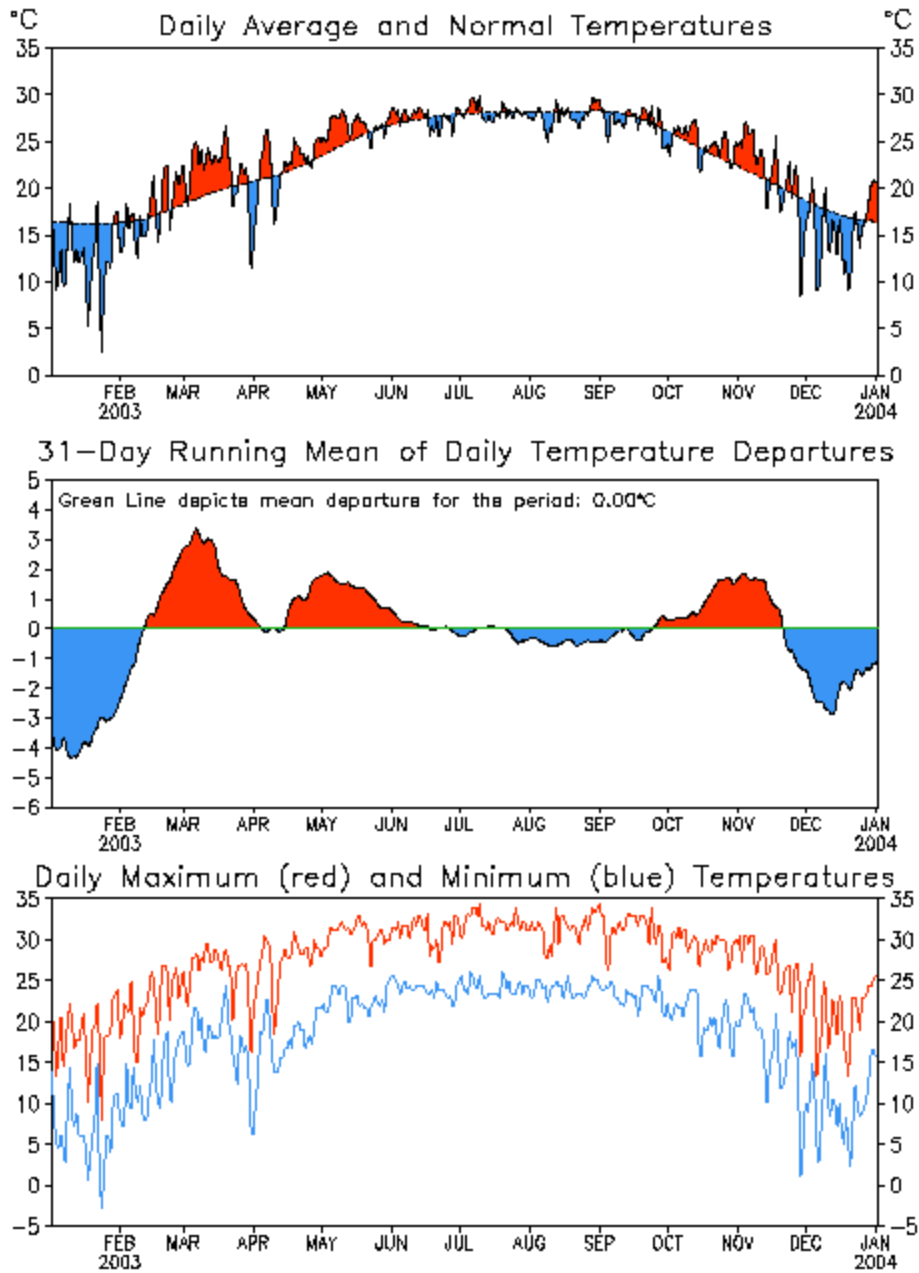


Figure 2. 2003 Departure from normal annual rainfall.

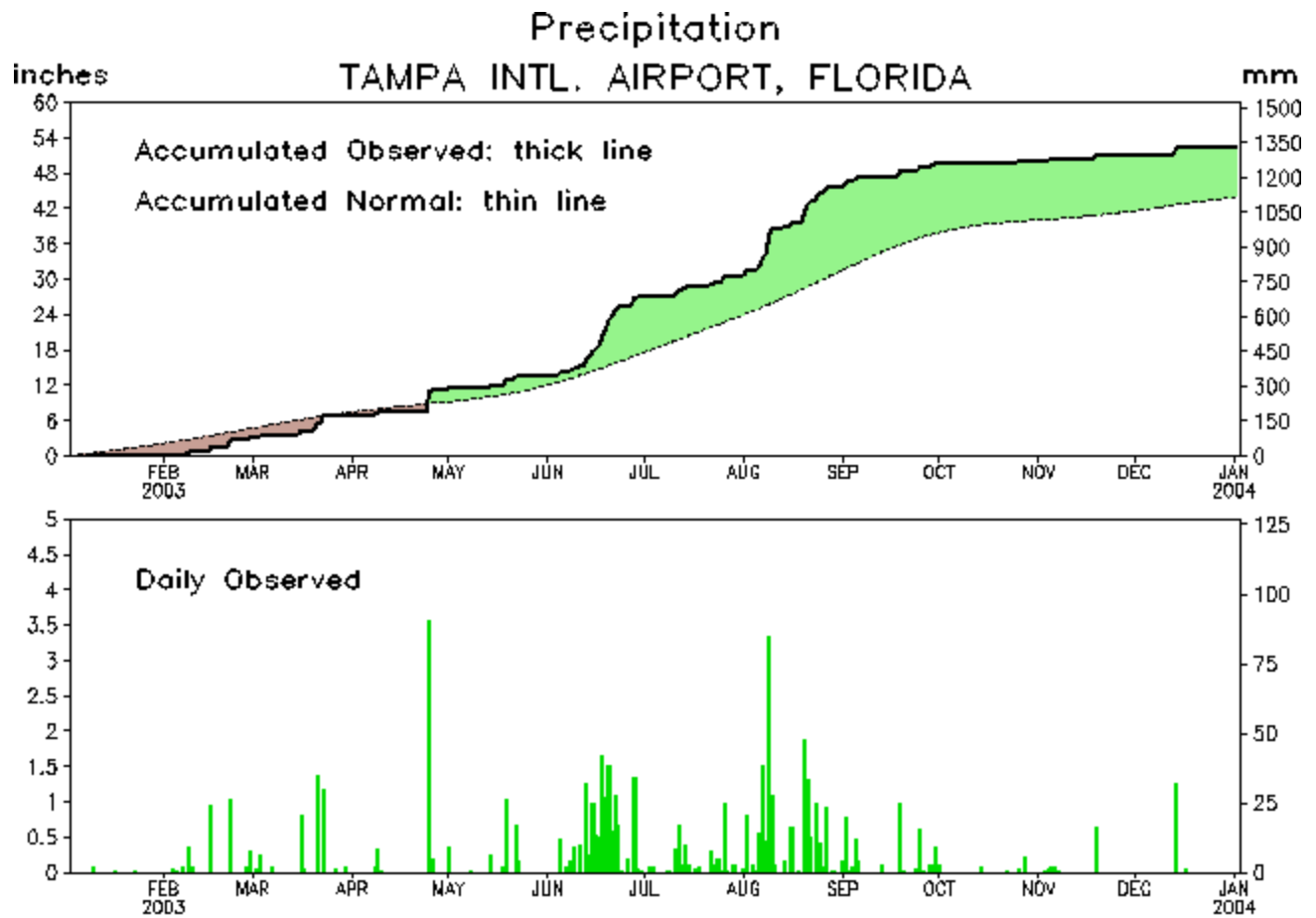
TAMPA INTL. AIRPORT, FLORIDA



Data updated through 01 JAN 2004

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Figure 3. 2003 Temperatures at Tampa International.



Data updated through 02 JAN 2004

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Figure 4. 2003 Rainfall at Tampa International.