

All in a Day's Work

Matt Murphy, Volunteer Observer for Met Éireann

Matt Murphy is a Volunteer Observer for Met Éireann and has been recording the weather on Sherkin Island since 1972, in the case of rainfall and 1974, for sunshine and temperatures.



Matt Murphy

Have you always been interested in what you do?

When I came to Sherkin in 1971 I soon realised that, on an island, the weather rules your life. It was then that I became fascinated by it and wanted to record the daily weather.

How did it come about that you became a volunteer weather observer for Met Éireann?

Because of my interest, I wrote to Met Éireann in 1972 and asked for advice on what equipment I would need to record weather data. They sent me catalogues from various suppliers in the UK but I soon realised the equipment would be too expensive. Met Éireann then said they could give me a rain gauge if I would record rainfall for them. So in June of that year, when Mr. Paddy Butler from Met Éireann arrived on the island with the rain gauge, I met him off the ferry with our horse Molly and cart. I brought him across the island to our home and he put the gauge in place in the front garden. The next month I began collecting rain data. A couple of years later, in 1974, Mr. Butler organised the Stevenson Screen, with the various thermometers (see page 11), and I went from there.

What training did you have to do?

It is not complicated. When Met Éireann installed the rain gauge in 1972, all I had to do was to empty the rain gauge every morning into a measure and record what I found—and that is how I still do it today. I was shown how to read the thermometers in the Stevenson Screen once and then I knew what to do after that.

What do you have to do each day?

At 9.00am GMT (Greenwich Mean time), I have to take the readings on the various thermometers and record the amount of rain that has fallen the previous day. When the hour changes, for the summer, I do exactly the same recording at 10.00 am. Each evening, after sunset, I change the card in the sunshine recorder. This card will have recorded any sunshine from that day. At the end of the month, I write all the data on a special form and send the data and the sunshine cards off to Met Éireann.

What is best about what you do?

I have really enjoyed seeing the data build up over the years and to know that it has been helpful to Met Éireann to have this data. I never imagined that I would still be collecting weather data in 2017, at the age of 82. After 45 years, I hope I can go on collecting data for as long as possible!

What is the worst thing about what you do?

Forgetting to change the sunshine card after sunset. I'd usually wake up in the middle of the night and on realising my error, have to get up and go out to change it before the sun comes up!

What equipment do you use?

All the equipment has been supplied by Met Éireann—thermometers, rain gauge, sunshine recorder and cards. These are explained on page 11.

Do you work alone or as part of a team?

If there are days that I am away, I am lucky that some of my children live on the island they can come and collect the data for me.

What advice would you give someone wanting to do your job?

I would suggest that you write to Met Éireann and express an interest. They are always looking for volunteers to collect rainfall data. It is a big commitment and you would have to be willing and able to collect the data every day at the same time.



It may have snowed but the sun was still shining!



Looking to see if there was any rainfall the day before.



Checking the temperature 30 cm below ground level.

Image courtesy of Susan Murphy Wickens

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