

# The Catch

## **A BUNCH OF MOISTURE**

FORT COLLINS, CO — Thursday, January 13, 2005

CoCoRaHS volunteers, etc.

### **Storm summary**

It has been fascinating the past two weeks watching the Pacific onslaught of moisture—ramming into western Colorado and far western Wyoming and evaporating as it spilled over the Continental Divide. There have been some incredibly large precipitation totals since Dec 28. The largest so far at any of our volunteer locations is 8.44" of water content (108.5" of new snow) at the long-time observing site north of Crested Butte at Gothic. As of this morning there was 72" of moisture-laden compacting snow on the ground. But several other sites in northern Gunnison County were not far behind. Automated data from even higher elevation locations showed even more snow.

You folks around Durango are also having quite a time—snow, rain, snow, rain—the slop on the ground must be almost all slush. The CoCo RaHS stations up north of Durango have now totaled about 7" of water content since December 28th.

Meanwhile, many of us have only had little dribs, drabs and skiffs while the wall of ominous bubbling clouds clung to the mountain crests.

### **Snow Measurement Battle**

We will never perfect the measurement of snow entirely. Snow is too dynamic and illusive for us to easily catch and measure. It blows about, drifts, melts, settles, and sometimes sticks to the rim and sides of the gauge. Other times it just howls past and doesn't bother to collect in the gauge. Finding the right place or places on the ground to measure also seems impossible at times. But despite the difficulties, I am seeing a whole lot of very good and very useful data coming in each day. Measuring snow is a bit science and a bit art and a lot of experience and common sense. As long as we keep trying and keep practicing, we'll keep getting better.

Remember, if you have a snow measurement question, please ask. We have posted a lot of the answers to your questions on the website. Click on "FAQ/Help" on the left hand menu and this may provide some assistance.

### **Check out the new site**

Speaking of "website", we launched the new site this past weekend without telling you. It is not quite ready to replace the old site entirely, but most data entry and many reports and maps are now working on both the old and new sites. You can click the link on the home page or just type in <http://new.cocorahs.org> and start checking it out.

You can begin entering data on the new system whenever you are ready. However, please know that if you enter data via the old system, it will appear on both the old and new, but if you enter via the new website, it will not update on the old maps and reports.

We have many improvements to make yet, so it will be several weeks before we totally shift over. We will continue to run both sites side by side as long as necessary. But get familiar with the new site if you have time, and take a look at the new county maps. We are not happy yet with our color contrasts, so expect to see some changes that will make the maps easier to read. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

### **The incredible value of volunteer weather data**

The following e-mail was distributed by an old friend of mine to all of us climatologists across the country two days ago. You may find it interesting. I totally agree with what it says.

----- Forwarded message -----

*Date: Mon, 10 Jan 2005 15:17:24 -0800*

*From: Myron Molnau*

*Subject: Value of records*

*It seems that I cannot quit looking at climate records. I found this the other day:*

*"The value of the meteorological record, like other scientific works, is not fully realized at the time it is made. Uses are continually made of it for purposes other than those for which it was originally intended. For this reason the voluntary observer has a claim on his neighbor for services performed."*

*Climate and Crop Service of the Weather Bureau, Idaho Section, Annual Summary  
1898, page 5*

*This comment is just as valid today as it was in 1898. We are still finding uses for old data but I am not so sure that the country as a whole is any more ready today than in 1898 to give much credit to the voluntary observer.*

*Myron Molnau  
Professor Emeritus and State Climatologist (retired and liking it)  
Biological and Agricultural Engineering Department  
University of Idaho  
Moscow, ID 83844*

### **Winter—turning the corner**

Today is Jan 12th. We're now getting closer to the half-way point in the winter snow accumulation season, and we're at about the midpoint for winter cold. The older we get, the happier we are to know that days are already getting longer, and in a matter of weeks we will begin to feel the increased warmth (the warmth tends to lag behind a bit).

But as the old adage goes, "As the days grow longer, the storms grow stronger." Late winter into spring is the traditional blizzard season for the High Plains. Blizzards are a serious matter not to be taken lightly. So as you think ahead to the longer days ahead, please know that the worst of winter may also lie ahead, especially east of the crest of the mountains.

### **And then comes hail**

We just placed an order today for Styrofoam—enough to make 3500 hail pads. That's our best estimate of how many we will need this coming summer. We keep thinking we will find sponsors who will help pay for the hail pad materials to help our project, but we haven't worked hard enough yet or found the right people.

Currently we are totally out of new hail pads, but in the months ahead expect a few hail pad parties and opportunities to get together with other weather watchers to prepare for summer. It will be fun.

Best wishes to all,  
*Nolan Doesken*