

The Catch

COCORAHS MAY DAY + 1—WORKSHOPS, WEATHER PATTERNS, AND CUT-OFF

FORT COLLINS, CO — Tuesday, May 2, 2006

It's the day after May Day. The northern Colorado lilacs are in bloom already. This brings back memories of my childhood - those few early grade school years where exchanging May baskets with both boys and girls seemed totally appropriate —and finding M&M's beneath the flowers made it all worthwhile. I also remember the Soviet parades on May Day and the fear of attack that we sometimes felt back then. Time marches on.

Big Finish to April -- Not!

It must have rained 7 different times here on Sunday, and we had several loud and exciting cracks of thunder. It was enough to chase me in from the garden. But when it was all over, all I found was 0.07" in my gauge and even less at our CSU campus weather station. We ended up with 0.22" for the month on campus and that tied for the 3rd driest April in our station's history. We were also much warmer than average. Believe it or not, we've measured temperatures and precipitation every day without missing for 118 years on Campus.

Will the month of May be better and wetter?

We're eyeing another storm headed our direction for midweek. Some of you in the Midwest and East probably can't even fathom this, but here every rain is a big deal and the phrase "Every Drop Counts" makes a ton of sense to us. Each storm that passes WITHOUT dropping much rain moves us a day closer to the inevitable dry heat wave that sweeps in almost every year in mid June, so we've got 6 weeks left to squeeze something out and put some moisture in the soil. In New Mexico and Southern Colorado spring precipitation is even iffier as the dry heat moves in more quickly there. This is our

precious wet time of year in northern Colorado. Our average precipitation from now to mid June in Fort Collins is 4 inches—almost as much as some of the more humid climates to our east. With only 0.22" in the past 6 weeks, it's easy to get depressed—but it's not too late yet. So let's cheer for this next storm.

Come to the Rocky Mountain Weather and Climate Workshop— May 20

We still have room for about 30 more people for the big weather day in Boulder, Colorado on Saturday, May 20th. If you want to attend and have not sent in your registration yet, please print out the registration form:<http://65.110.83.63/Content.aspx?page=calendar> and then scroll down to "Other Events" and you will find the registration form. Print it, fill it out, and send it in.

The fee pays for a good lunch, and your early registration assures us that we will get you through Federal security at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration facilities in Boulder, CO. (that is, if you remember to bring your photo ID with you). It will be a dandy day in Colorado on the 20th and we're looking forward to seeing many of you there as we all learn more about what makes our storms tick. Remember—get your registration postmarked by the end of the day May 8th so we will have everyone's names by May 8th. Thanks!

If you have any questions, please contact Henry at:

Henry Reges (hreges@atmos.colostate.edu) or call 970 491-1196

Cut-off Lows??

Have you noticed the slow moving swirls of clouds on the satellite pictures on your favorite website or TV station these past few weeks? One of these spun several days of heavy snow into the Black Hills as well as SE Montana and NE Wyoming a few days ago. Another of these storms drifted across southern AZ last week bringing New Mexico and southern Colorado some much-needed rain. In fact, there has been a slow-moving low pressure area on the weather maps for several weeks now somewhere over the U.S. If you're near one, you get soaked, and if your not, you're dry. Some of these slow-moving storm systems are associated with what meteorologists call "Cut-off

Lows". These are areas of low pressure that started out as traveling waves along the jet stream but then broke off from the upper level winds spinning freely and independently—and seemingly out of control. They are called "cut offs" because they cut off from the main jet stream and just drift around quite independently. These are very much like spinning tops stopping, wobbling, but continuing for some time before finally fizzling. They are responsible for much of our spring precipitation, but they can be challenging to predict. By late May, they become infrequent and gradually give way to the doldrums of summer where winds aloft are light, and most precipitation is associated with isolated or systematic groupings of thunderstorms. Summer is when our rainfall patterns are most random, and the role of CoCoRaHS observers in documenting localized storms is most significant.

During mid winter when the jet stream is moving faster, storms keep marching around the world in the mid latitudes at a high speed, but during this seasonal transition, these cutoffs may tarry for several days in one place before finally moving on. Copious amounts of rain can accompany these systems, as Indiana recently learned.

So keep an eye out for our springtime "Cut-off Lows", and make sure you and your rain gauge are ready to measure.

What's Next?

We get many questions from our volunteers about setting up weather stations, taking observations, measuring snow and hail, and sending in data via computer. But most of all, we get many questions about "why are we doing this and who needs and uses the data we are gathering". In one of my next messages I will describe some of the expected and unexpected ways that organizations are using CoCoRaHS data and why precipitation data is so popular.

Special Seminar

One of our guest Speakers for the Rocky Mountain Weather and Climate Workshop, Mr. Grant Goodge from the mountains of western North Carolina, has agreed to stay in Colorado an extra day. Mr. Goodge is an inspired weather photographer and weather explainer.

CoCoRaHS is sponsoring a special Grant Goodge Weather Photography seminar open to all CoCoRaHS volunteers, friends and family. Here are the details:

Date: Monday, May 22, 2006
Location: Loveland, Colorado
Gertrude B. Scott Library Multipurpose Room
300 N. Adams Ave.

NO RSVP is required, no food will be served, good weather is not guaranteed, but I assure you this will be an inspiring photo show of common and uncommon weather phenomena. I hope you can come. We'll post this to our calendar of events shortly.

The end

Cumulus clouds are building and the wind is blowing. It must be spring.

Make it a better day,

Nolan Doesken