

The Catch

COCORAHS—IT'S DEEP WINTER!

FORT COLLINS, CO — Saturday, January 19, 2008

Winter weekend greetings to all CoCoRaHS participants and friends

It's foggy and cold (+7F) here in Fort Collins this morning and everything is coated in a heavy layer of frost. Tree branches and fence wires are all thickly and beautifully adorned. We still have old snow and ice on the ground, but it's been gradually melting and sublimating over the past 3 weeks with about 1/3 of the ground now bare. This is our 44th straight day with most of the ground covered by snow—but it's getting thin.

Snow in the South—good job measuring

Earlier this week many of you in Alabama, Tennessee and North Carolina got a chance to test your snow measurement skills. You did a good job!! The main problem that I saw was that there were quite a few folks that reported 0.0 for the new snow amount because it all melted by 7 AM the next morning.

Remember, report the greatest accumulation that occurs anytime during the day even if it's all gone by the next morning. For example, if it snowed in the morning (after 7 AM) and accumulated to a depth of 0.6" and had a water content of 0.08" -- and then the snow ended and melted and there was no snow left the next morning at your observation, then you should report 0.08" for "Rain/melted snow", 0.6" for the "Depth of new snow" and 0.0" for your "Depth of total snow" - - which is simply the depth of snow that remains at the time of your observation.

Today, snow is falling even farther south -- all the way down to Louisiana and southern Alabama. I hope our new CoCoRaHS volunteers in those states are ready for this exciting challenge. You don't get snow that often, so enjoy it and give us a good report of what fell!

Deep winter!

The coldest temperatures in the atmosphere often lag behind the shortest day of the year by about one month -- and that means this is the time for cold. Looking at weather maps across the country, it's cold pretty much coast to coast and coldest in the middle. Currently it's -13F in Green Bay, Wis. with a brisk wind -- great football weather, if you're a polar bear.

From here on, the day length (time between sunrise and sunset) becomes noticeably longer each week, and gradually the greater solar energy will begin to win out and start warming us up again. Our CoCoRaHS friends in the Gunnison and San Luis Valleys of southern Colorado are beginning to look forward to this. After getting deep snows earlier this winter, frigid air has settled into those valleys and won't dislodge. They have already had several weeks with temperatures between -20 and -35F at night -- a bit nippy. Interestingly, the temperatures in the surrounding higher mountains are above the inversion layer and have been quite a bit warmer.

WeatherFest

Tomorrow is the launch of the 88th Annual Meeting of the American Meteorological Society. This week-long professional gathering will begin with an open house for the general public tomorrow (Sunday) from noon to 4 PM at the New Orleans Convention Center in Louisiana. This event is called WeatherFest and is a great way for the public to get to meet weather professionals and get a taste of our science. CoCoRaHS will be there!

In a way, it is hard for me to believe, in this very high tech field of modern meteorology, that our "lowly and low tech" CoCoRaHS network is playing a major role. But the fact remains that precipitation is very important for our lives and livelihoods, it varies so much from place to place, and it is not easy to measure perfectly. Our backyard measurements are playing a very important role in meteorology and hydrology even in the 21st Century.

Here is the link to the AMS annual meeting WeatherFest activity. We officially launch the Louisiana CoCoRaHS effort tomorrow and will be hosting a water balloon toss to see who can get the most water in a rain gauge. Wish us luck!! And I hope the snow stays north of New Orleans so the plane I'll be on gets in safely tonight.

<http://www.ametsoc.org/meet/annual/weatherfest.html>

CoCoRaHS Surge -- many new observers

We're experiencing a lull in new applications right now but a surge in participation as more and more new volunteers are getting their gauges mounted. We are now getting well over 4000 precipitation entries per day. Yahoo!!! But still there are many (thousands, actually) who signed up to be a CoCoRaHS weather reporter but have never gotten around to reporting.

Don't be shy. We'd love to have you join the network. If you have any challenges, difficulties, unanswered questions or other obstacles to participation, please contact your local or regional coordinator.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=coord>

The Lab is gone

Not directly related to CoCoRaHS, but of personal interest, the energetic yellow Labrador that we cared for over the Holidays has returned to her family. Peace has been restored in our local animal kingdom. Our cats can finally relax and our chickens have even begun laying eggs again. Now if only I didn't have a corral full of ice and frozen horse manure, life would be good. Maybe it's better than mud. That will come next.

Fund raising update

I just wanted to thank those of you who have made financial contributions to CoCoRaHS over the past month to help make sure that CoCoRaHS can continue going and growing. I am pleased to report that several thousand dollars have been donated -- enough to really help a lot. We also now have a list of potential business sponsors that we will begin contacting later this year.

Several of you asked what monthly contribution would be needed if we got to the point that CoCoRaHS needed to be fully supported by volunteer participants. We did the math, and it looks like as of today, a contribution of about \$3/month for each active participant would do the job. I am still not comfortable with the idea that volunteers should need to give both their time and some \$ to make a project like this work. 5-minutes of time each day to measure and report precipitation is already a significant contribution. But this is a model of success that many volunteer programs use, so it's worth exploring. As we continue to add new volunteers, we may be able to see the expense per volunteer drop to about \$1/month by 2010 -- and that would be great. Contributions will continue to be welcomed, and if you have suggestions for possible supporters or fund raising ideas, please share them with me.

Sorrow in the CoCoRaHS family

It's a real bumner, but over the past 2 years each of us on the CoCoRaHS staff here at Colorado State University have lost a close family member. This week it was Julian's turn. As you know, Julian is our dedicated Web Developer who maintains the CoCoRaHS website and answers the hundreds of e-mail questions we get each week (explaining why we don't do as many upgrades as we would like :-). Julian's father passed away earlier this week unexpectedly at home in Virginia, just a few days after getting to see his new grandson for the first time. The CoCoRaHS flag (there is no such thing) will be flying at half mast for some time. Our thoughts and prayers are with Julian and family. Don't expect to see much progress on the website or responses to your e-mails for awhile, but we're trying to cover as best we can.

Enjoy,

I hope you have a good weekend and get something done you needed cold weather for.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken

Colorado State University