

The Catch

COCORAHS - SOME GOOD NEWS

FORT COLLINS, CO — Saturday, November 6, 2010

Dear rain gaugers,

Just a few CoCoRaHS items today to share.

Remember, as cold weather sets in, that the inner tube of the CoCoRaHS rain gauge is susceptible to freezing and cracking. Don't let water freeze solid in the tube. If snow or freezing precipitation is expected, remove the funnel and inner cylinder and catch the precipitation in the outer cylinder. Every year we hear many complaints "my gauge cracked -- I can't measure any more". This can be avoided with a little planning and preparation. Refer to snow measurement training materials on the CoCoRaHS website.

1) Interesting weather happening -- as usual

It's still dark here in Colorado as I write this morning, but when I checked the national weather map when I first woke up I see that it is warmer this morning in much of Colorado, Wyoming and Montana than it is in Georgia and northern Florida. Alas, the atmosphere is doing what it loves to do -- and does it best when the winds aloft in the troposphere are strong and "meridional" (moving north-south rather than "zonal" which is west to east). Ridges and troughs are migrating about pushing cold air southward in some areas while pulling warm air northward in others. Our forecast for the weekend is glorious with high temperatures predicted in the upper 70s. Meanwhile Atlanta will barely reach 50 today. That will all change next week as a trough of low pressure moves into the Rockies and the east will warm up. Our weather -- is just amazing. I love it.

2) Updated Water Year Summaries

The updated Water Year Summaries for 2010 (that cover October 2009 – Sept 2010) have now been updated and posted. If you submitted any reports at all during this 12-month period, we created a summary for your station. We also compiled all the summaries by county and state.

To view your own station summary in either Excel or in HTML -- click on "My Account" at the top of the CoCoRaHS website <http://www.cocorahs.org>

If you want to view other station summaries in your area or anywhere in the country, then go to "View Data". About half way down that list you'll come to "2009-2010 Water Year Summary Reports". Click on that and then go exploring. We did notice one little goof. The HTML version of these reports is only displaying monthly and annual precipitation totals to the nearest 0.1" and is truncating the "hundredths". We'll get that fixed eventually. The Excel versions have the hundredths correct.

As you view these reports you will see firsthand the amazing variations of precipitation across the country this past water year. I've spotted at least 3 stations that received over 100" for the year, but there are also dozens in the western states that totaled less than 10" and a few with less than 5" You have to go into the individual reports to see and compare snowfall totals, but I found one station in the mountains of Colorado that totaled 433" of snowfall for this past water year. Think about what that must be like. I have visited this beautiful location and met this great weather observer and naturalist. The road to his house is not plowed during the winter, so when he needs groceries he gets to ski to town -- making sure, of course, to avoid avalanche chutes.

A CoCoRaHS reality is that we encourage people to participate as much or as little as they can realistically fit into their schedules. As a result, many people are able to help with CoCoRaHS, but only a modest fraction of the stations have complete data for all or most of the year. We don't notice this when we look at the maps for any given day, but it really stands out when you look at the water years summaries and compare the number of reports. So don't let that bother you. It's just a natural part of CoCoRaHS. But for purposes of summarizing precipitation nationally, we will focus on those stations with complete data.

With the help of friends and family, I was able to measure and report all 365 days and my total in northwest Fort Collins was 17.03" of precipitation (rain and melted snow) which is about 1.50" above my

long-term average. My snowfall total was 93.3" -- the most I've measured since starting CoCoRaHS. By next year we hope to have estimates of 30-year averages for almost every CoCoRaHS station so we can all interpret our data in historic perspective, even if we're just starting. We also want to provide graphing options so we can visually see and compare our data.

Also keep in mind that some of us report each and every day when precipitation falls but don't always report on dry days. These data may appear incomplete when you look at the "Days Covered by All Reports" but when you look at the monthly and annual totals you'll see they compare well with those stations that report every day.

If you look closely at the summary reports you'll notice that some stations show more than 365 days. How could that be? This can be explained by conflicts with overlapping periods from multiday accumulation reports. The monthly and seasonal totals may still be correct for these stations but the number of days covered may not be. For example, we found one station that showed over 3000 reports for this past year. It turns out they mistyped the year when they were entering a multiday report so it appeared that they entered an accumulation that covered 2001 through 2010 -- Opps. But it can be easily fixed, so it's not as bad as it looks.

There will be opportunities now to improve these reports. Some of you prefer to keep your statistics from Jan-Dec instead of Oct-Sep, so we will plan to do a calendar year summary as well.

3) CoCoRaHS Rain Gauge Calendars

As of yesterday, about 300 CoCoRaHS calendars have been sold. We printed about 3000 (I hope we weren't too optimistic). We need to sell over 1600 to break even. After that, we hope to raise a little revenue for supporting CoCoRaHS. We understand that WeatherYourWay will start shipping the calendars to their new homes beginning later next week. I'm not exactly ready for Christmas shopping yet (for me that's after Dec 20 :-)) but do consider this new calendar as a unique gift for the weather watcher on your list. We added a page inside the calendar to describe what CoCoRaHS is and encourage new volunteers to join.

4) Some very good news

I have some great news to share about CoCoRaHS and our future plans. It will have to wait until next time though because . . . the eastern sky is lighting up with a beautiful sunrise is taking shape. I need to sign off

and quickly eat some breakfast. My list of outdoor chores for today is immense and over optimistic, but we just don't get that many chances in November to have weekends this warm and sunny. So I'll hop to it and talk to you later. We'll even be doing some house painting we never quite finished this summer.

Take care. Enjoy your weekend, and thanks for being a part of CoCoRaHS.

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University