

The Catch

COCORAHS -- SUMMER'S HOME STRETCH

FORT COLLINS, CO — Thursday, August 4, 2011

Greetings fellow rain gauge readers:

It has been a beautiful couple of days here in Colorado with temperatures barely reaching 80F and bubbling cumulonimbus clouds each day -- a welcome break from the recent heat. We'll do our best to send cooler air down towards Oklahoma and Texas -- but it may take a few weeks to get there.

Welcome to all of you who are new to CoCoRaHS. We continue to add an average of about 10 new volunteers each day -- and we're very grateful for each and every one. Each volunteer, every new rain gauge, and each rainfall measurement helps tell the never-ending story of watering the land -- tracking each storm system and mapping each rainfall pattern. Please study and enjoy the national rainfall map that you help create each day (<http://www.cocorahs.org>) Click on it to zoom into your own state and county.

For those of you just getting started, please let us know if you have any questions or need any help. Contact me or send a message to info@cocorahs.org

Oh, the heat

Do you remember life without air conditioners? If you're over 60 you'll remember it well. But people less than 50 or 55 years old may have few memories of those hot summer days and nights -- sweating in your sleep and hardly able to move on summer afternoons. My mother told me I nearly died during the Midwest summer heat wave of 1954. I was too small to remember.

What would life have been like this year without AC in places like Oklahoma and Texas where temperatures have hit 100 almost every day for the past 5 weeks and several of those days when temperatures soared to 110F and higher. It would not be pretty. The good news is that for much of the country (CA a noticeable exception) we're soon past the climatological maximum for temperatures. Cooler weather is soon around the corner. We're already 6 weeks past the summer solstice, so day length (time between sunrise and sunset) is shorter and becoming more noticeable every day. Imagine, in less than 2 months we'll be talking snow again in the Rockies.

Tropical weather

Yes, it's August and we're now headed into the most active two-month period in the annual hurricane season. Tropical Storm Don got Texans excited last week but then didn't amount to much. This week it's T.S. Emily taking aim on Florida and the Carolina's. All of you in hurricane country are well versed in planning and preparation. Take all appropriate precautions. If you are able to stay home, do your best to measure and report rainfall totals safely. Tropical storm-related rainfall could conceivably take a big bite out of the southern drought. Tropical storms that form over the Pacific Ocean can also bring rains to the SW states, although that doesn't happen as often. We'll all keep watching and waiting -- and measuring.

Full gauges!

When I last wrote I mentioned the fact that every year we see a few storms somewhere in the country that drop enough rainfall to totally fill our large gauges (over 11" in a day). As of early July we hadn't come close. But since then there have been some whopper local storms and there have been at least 3 reports of full gauges. More may be on the way.

You may think it will never happen to you, but it really is possible to get over 11" of rain in a day in many parts of the U.S. -- even in places like Colorado. Last week was the 14th anniversary of the storm that helped start CoCoRaHS -- the flash flood of July 28, 1997 in Fort Collins. 35 years ago on the evening of July 31, 1976 was the infamous Big Thompson Canyon flood resulting from over a foot of rain in a few hours between Estes Park and Loveland, CO. Over 140 lives were lost that night. Some of you carry your own stories from that storm. Other parts of the country have had their own similar storms and stories.

Please be ready for when that time comes for your area.

Alaska and Hawaii

Yes, we have volunteers in both of our distant states. Since June 1 we've had reports from 20 volunteers in Alaska with 2-month rainfall totals ranging from over 10" west of Juneau to just over 1" at Skagway. During that same 64-day period we've had 14 volunteers reporting from Hawaii with totals ranging from over 18" near Pahoe (far east end of the big Island of Hawaii) to only 1.51" at Kalaoa (the far west end of that same island). There is no such thing as rain gauge boredom in parts of Hawaii. Our observer at Pahoehoe has had measurable rainfall on 63 of the last 64 days. There have been only nine dry days there since January 1.

Looking down on rain gauges

I've seen a lot of country the last few weeks, and a great variety of weather. A family wedding took us to California followed by two weeks of climatological conferences and workshops in North Carolina. En route I enjoyed views of extensive snow still lingering in the Rocky Mountains and Sierra. I saw summer fog and felt the cool, gentle and moist marine layer creep inland from the Pacific Ocean. My connecting flight through Phoenix was grounded for a few hours by a giant haboob (dust storm). A second haboob struck shortly after our plane took off but I felt very fortunate to have a window seat to watch from the air the churning mile-thick cloud of dust rolling our way -- spectacular. There were thunderheads to watch over Albuquerque and hot haze over the southern states. Storms bubbled up over the Smokey Mountains. We "savored" that rich summer humidity that we miss here in Colorado. Then on the way back I had the unusual summertime experience of flying from Charlotte NC to Denver with not a single glimpse of a thunderhead or a distant flash of lightning -- as the persistent high pressure ridge bringing this summer's heat wave suppressed thunderstorm development over that entire 1600-mile swath of the country.

What really hit me on this journey, looking down on our wonderful country from above, was the fact that everywhere we flew we were looking down on rain gauges -- Rocky Mountain and Colorado River valley rain gauges, Great Salt Lake basin and Wasatch Mountain rain gauges, Sierra and San Joaquin Valley rain gauges, San Jose and Santa Cruz mountain rain gauges, Phoenix and Albuquerque rain gauges, Little Rock, Birmingham and Atlanta rain gauges, Piedmont and southern Appalachian rain gauges, Mississippi Valley and Ozark Mountain rain

gauges, Kansas prairie and Colorado Front Range rain gauges and many others in between.

Of course I couldn't really spot each gauge, but I could see their neighborhoods -- farms and cropland, pastures and grasslands, forests, small towns, suburbs and cities. I looked down on close to 1000 CoCoRaHS rain gauges and hundreds more National Weather Service gauges -- and probably thousands of hardware store rain gauges at homes that still don't know about CoCoRaHS. Looking out the window of those planes and realizing how big and varied our country is -- and how important rain and snow is -- I was glad to know that we're trying to do something useful and helpful. At the climate meetings in Asheville, North Carolina at least six speakers -- maybe even more -- made reference to CoCoRaHS precipitation data. I think we're doing a very good thing.

Reporting significant weather

A short reminder -- again. If heavy rain or hail is falling or has just fallen -- and if you can safely get on your computer -- please submit a "Significant Weather Report" and/or a hail report if appropriate. You'll find these report options under "My Data" and on the upper left hand menu bar when you are logged on. These supplemental reports do not replace your regular daily precipitation report, but they do give you the opportunity to report storms in progress. Whether you've been soaked with 2" of rain in the past hour or two, or 0.26" in the past 5-10 minutes, this timely information on rainfall rates or hail is a big help to weather forecasters and many others.

To see what these reports look like from other volunteers, just click on <http://www.cocorahs.org/ViewData/ListIntensePrecipReports.aspx> Then click on "Select State" from the state dropdown menu to view all reports for the whole country. You'll see how helpful those reports can be.

Grasshoppers taking over

For the second year in a row, the grasshoppers are taking over. Since the hot, sunny, dry weather set in 3 weeks ago, they are eating the pasture grass faster than the horses, and are decimating parts of our garden that Henry and Noah (CoCoRaHS staff) are caring for this year. The chickens are excited about the possibilities, and our fast-growing puppy is trying to chase and catch them with some small success. But the rest of us hate

grasshoppers. Three days of cool, damp weather would slow them down, but that's not in the forecast.

Angel (our Great Pyrenees) has drooled enough this past month to fill a small swimming pool. She's totally ready for winter. As for the horse corral, it's turned back to dust. I can almost guess how much it's rained in the last day, week and month, just by walking out to the barn, flaking some hay bales and scooping some manure. Everything is interconnected.

Thank you

Thanks for sticking with CoCoRaHS and doing what you can to help. Enjoy the rest of the summer, and be ready in case you're in the path of the next big storm. If you know folks in your area or in other parts of the country who might want to help measure their rainfall, please get them signed up. And if you have any extra water, send it to Texas -- they need it badly.

Best wishes,

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