

CHATS WITH THE WEATHER MAN

Friday, Sept. 20, 1929.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

ANNOUNCEMENT: Every other Friday we are going to have our old friend, who is a volunteer weather observer for the U. S. Weather Bureau, chat with us about the weather. All of us talk about the weather, but here is a man who knows something about it. He has been watching the skies and his thermometers and things for --- I won't say how many years. --- Alright old Ob Server, what about the weather now? -----

The weather, some of you may have observed, is always first page news.

About this time of the year, however, it sometimes breaks out of that little box in the corner of the page and spreads itself into the big headlines. This is the open season for those West Indian hurricanes.

Every time one of those storms is reported starting up, some of my neighbors breeze in and storm me with such questions as "What is a hurricane? Where do they come from? -- Where do they go? How fast do they travel? --- And how can the Weather Bureau keep track of them, and warn the people they are coming?"

I used to have trouble answering some of the questions ----- to a considerable extent, hurricanes have passed me by. So I took myself and those questions to Mr. Charles L. Mitchell, one of the Weather Men at the main office. He has traced out the comings and goings of hurricanes. He has straightened out some of the twists in our knowledge of those big cyclonic storms.

That was quite a job, too. No two hurricanes are just exactly alike. Each takes a little different path. Some move faster and some move farther than others. Some are what you might call overgrown hurricanes and some are mere baby hurricanes -- some babies.

And, by the way, a West Indian hurricane, a Western Pacific typhoon and an Indian Ocean cyclone are the same sort of storm: --- and that is a sort even the best of sailors will go a long way around to avoid. And when the hurricane hits land, it seems to have a way of looking up the buildings that are badly built.

Anyway, the Weather Bureau men say that few well-built buildings collapse and hurt folks; in case the hurricane comes their way; except possibly when the

hurricane is one of those rare record-beaters in intensity.

Nearly all the hurricanes that strike our Gulf and South Atlantic Coast and many more that miss us entirely are born either over the eastern Atlantic Ocean in the vicinity of the Cape Verde Islands or in the western Caribbean Sea or the Gulf of Mexico. And they all come along from June to November, with September their favorite month.

Of course, that is because weather conditions are favorable for such storms getting through to our coast at this time. They start out over the warm, tropical sea, and, although each one takes a little different path, as a general rule, each moves westward or northwestward and then curves again and shoots north-eastward.

Whether the hurricane plows across our landscape or detours this country altogether and heads out to sea depends on what is in the way.

Those of you who have seen these big storms root up trees and hurl down houses and seemingly pick up the sea and throw it at the land might think that nothing could stand in the way of a full-sized hurricane.

A small hurricane may make a path of damage from a few miles to 30 or 40 miles wide, while one of the bigger hurricanes spreads destruction by wind along a path from 50 to 100 miles or more, wide.

The hurricane itself, that is, the general movement of this big eddy of violent winds, is comparatively slow. The average hurricane advances along its route at the rate of about 15 miles an hour. The swirling winds which make up the hurricane however may be blowing at a rate of 100 or in extreme cases nearly 200 miles an hour.

But big and fierce as such storms are, they are mere whirling bubbles compared to the great air movements of the earth. And in making its path, the hurricane seeks the easiest way. The great areas of high air pressure, which we usually associate with clear, fine weather, serve as barriers.

Mr. Mitchell in tracing the paths of the hurricanes has found that the hurricanes always follow the troughs of low pressure. High pressure areas effectively block the progress of the storm. The hurricane finds its way out between the barriers of high pressure.

The particular path of any hurricane headed toward our coast depends on the position of and movement of these big areas of high pressure which block the road.

Often folks ask me how the Weather Bureau manages to forecast the appearance of a hurricane on our coast.

It is not always easy and the weather man has to know his hurricanes. Experience and knowledge of the past performances of hurricanes helps a lot. Then from the barometer readings from stations all over the continent, the Weather Bureau keeps track of the areas of high and low pressure, and charts their movements every day.

A glance of the weather map shows the experienced forecaster where the movement of the hurricane is likely to be blocked.

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But I can hear some of you say, "How does he know there is a hurricane and which way it is moving?"

You have a good part of the answer to that question when you remember that a hurricane moves slowly. A hurricane advances along its path much slower than the ordinary automobile tourist. And in advancing from its birthplace in the Atlantic Ocean or the Carribean Sea, the hurricane must pass through a net-work of Weather Bureau stations and vessels at sea reporting to the Weather Bureau twice a day. A sudden drop in the barometer and a change in direction or an increase in the velocity of the wind may serve to show the location of the center of the storm. Later observations from other stations or vessels at known distances from the first often show the speed and direction at which the hurricane is traveling.

Through this vast net-work of stations, the Weather Bureau gathers the information, which makes possible the predicting of the path of these gigantic storms. Warnings are issued twelve to twenty-four or more hours ahead, which enable many to avoid destruction by the hurricane.

And that is just one service of the U. S. Weather Bureau.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Two weeks from this date, our friend Ob Server will be back to tell us more about the ways of the weather and the weather men.

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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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