

Weather Lore – Part 1:

“Red Skies and Sun Dogs – Mares’ Tails and August Fogs” *Predicting Weather the Old-Fashioned Way*

By *Coleen Vansant*

Information Manager, Alabama Forestry Commission

For most of us we only monitor the weather to see if it is going to be too hot, too cold, too rainy, or too windy for us to carry on our daily routines or weekend hobbies. We turn on the television to any number of network newscasts or monitor the Weather Channel to get the latest forecast.

A certified meteorologist presents us with charts, graphs, and maps of Doppler radar, Nexrad, air streams, temperatures, wind chills, heat indexes, and wind patterns all carefully plotted and predicted by computers aimed at satellites thousands of miles in space.

Today we know the exact tracking of a hurricane the moment it forms off the coast of Africa, and with sophisticated radar we can actually see a tornado form in the colorful mass on our television screens, while emergency sirens and weather radios give us warnings of impending life threatening weather. With the flip of a switch, turn of a button, or click of a mouse, we can find out quickly what the weather will do tomorrow or next week.

A thousand, one hundred, or even fifty years ago, the average person had no inkling of El Nino or La Nina, much less knowledge of how it would affect him and his family a year from now. All he knew of weather was what the things

around him told him: the sun, moon, animals, plants, and insects. These were his weather predictors and he watched them faithfully and carefully.

Man’s use of the sky to predict the weather is documented as far back as biblical days.

Matthew 16:2-3 reads, “He (Jesus) answered and said unto them, ‘When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring.’” (KJV)

Go back even to the days of primitive man and you will see him depending on mother nature to tell him both the short and long range changes in weather. Our forefathers were farmers and hunters, shepherds and sailors, woodsmen and builders. The present and future existence of his family depended on his knowledge

of nature and being able to read the “predictors” that would tell him of coming changes in the weather and what he needed to do to prepare.

Farmers carefully watched for signs to know when to plant or harvest; sailors took notice of the sky, wind, and waves for signs of change in the weather. Shepherds and hunters learned that animals and insects would warn them of impending changes. Because so many were uneducated and the written word was rare, many of these observations were committed to poems and rhyme for easy recollection. For this reason, these simple proverbs were passed down from generation to generation. Over the centuries they have been altered some to accommodate the times, but they still provide a keen insight into how our ancestors looked to the heavens and nature for their weather forecast. Listed here are some of the more reliable and comical weather rhymes and ditties:

Rain before seven, fine before eleven.

*Cold is the night
when the stars shine bright.*

*Chimney smoke descends,
our nice weather ends.*

*When the ditch and pond offend the nose,
look out for rain and stormy blows.*

*When clouds look like black smoke,
a wise man will put on his cloak.*

*A rainbow in the morning
is the shepherd's warning.
A rainbow at night
is the shepherd's delight.*

*Catchy drawer and sticky door,
Coming rain will pour and pour.*

*When the wind blows from the west,
fish bite best.
When it blows from the east,
fish bite the least.*

*Red sky at night, sailors' delight;
Red sky in morning, sailors take warning.*

Rain then the wind, pick up and go in.

*If salt pork turns sour,
then be ready for a shower.*

*When a cow bellows three times without
stopping, rain will come a hopping.*

*If a cold August follows a hot July,
It foretells a winter hard and dry.*

*If there's thunder during Christmas week,
the winter will be anything but meek.*

*If it thunders on All Fool's Day,
It brings good crops of corn and hay.*

*The moon and the weather may change
together, but a change of the moon
will not change the weather.*

*Sea gull, sea gull, sit on the sand, It's never
good weather while you're on the land.*

Because it was so vast and obvious, one of the main weather indicators was the heavens and all of its bodies. The sun, moon, stars, sky, clouds and even rainbows were all depended on to give signs of what was to come. For instance, for sailors a blue sky in the northwest foretells fair weather and a good breeze. A Zuni Indian saying is, "If the moon's face is red, of water she speaks." One old proverb is that a rainbow in the morning indicates approaching rain; a rainbow at sunset tells that rain is leaving and fair weather is on the way. More weather lores pertaining to the sky and celestial bodies are listed below.

*A ring around the sun or moon,
means rain or snow coming soon.*

*If you look at the sun in the middle of the
day and there is a white halo (a Sun Dog)
around it, there will be a drastic change
in the weather within 12-24 hours.*

*A red sun at dusk (not a red sky)
tells of dry weather.*

*Mares' tails (cirrus clouds) and
mackerel scales (altocumulus clouds)
make tall ships carry low sails.*

*Evening red and morning gray,
sends the traveler on his way.
Evening gray and morning red,
brings the rain down on his head.*

*When small clouds join and thicken,
expect rain.*

*The sky turns green in a storm
when there is hail.*

*A veering wind will clear the sky,
A backing wind says storms are nigh.*

*A round-topped cloud and flattened base,
carries rainfall in its face.*

*When the wind is from the south
the rain is in its mouth.*

Clear moon, frost soon.

The east wind brings aches and pains.

A falling meteor predicts fair weather.

*If rain falls while the sun shines,
then the shower will last half an hour.*

Of all the seasons, earlier man appears to have been more worried about what winter would bring. Making preparations for himself, his family, and animals to survive what could be a long harsh winter was of vital importance. He was dependent on signs of nature to tell him what to expect during the winter months. There are far more proverbs and lores dealing with Old Man Winter than any other season. For instance, for every fog in August, there will be a snowfall in winter. When you hear the first cicada of the summer, expect the first frost of the year in exactly 90 days. Listed below are more sayings dealing with predicting the oncoming winter.

*Two frosts and lots of rain mean cold
weather is near.*

A late frost means a bad winter.

*At least three severe fogs in June or July
mean early snow.*

*Lots of low rolling thunder in the late fall
means a bad winter.*

*A long hot summer means a long cold
winter.*

*It will be a hard winter if smoke from the
chimney flows toward or settles on the
ground.*

If it's cloudy and smoke rises, expect snow.

*The number of days old the moon is
at the first snow, tells how many snows
there will be that winter.*

Burning wood pops before rain or snow.

*The closer the new moon to Christmas
Day, the harder the winter.*

*A warm November is the sign of a bad
winter.*

Thunder in the fall foretells a cold winter.

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Photo by Coleen Versant

Predicting Weather the Old-Fashioned Way

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After winter, rain was the next thing our forefathers worried about and there are many proverbs dealing with this subject. Next to a cold hard winter, rain affected them more than anything else. It is said that if it begins raining on the day the moon becomes full, it will continue raining until the moon quarters. Also, if it rains on Easter Sunday, it will rain every Sunday for seven weeks. It is believed it will rain if the following situations occur:

... *If the horns of the crescent moon point down.*

... *If the sun sets with clouds.*

... *If an ant covers the holes to his hill.*

... *If earthworms come to the surface of the ground.*

If there is a ring around the moon, count the stars in the ring and it will rain within that many days.

It will rain within three days if you see a black snake in a tree.

Campfires smoke more before a rain.

Look for foam on the river before a rain.

Water rising in springs and wells indicates rain.

When dew is on the grass, rain will never come to pass.

Sometimes weather was even predicted by the weather. Many believed the first frost of autumn would occur exactly six

months after the first thunderstorm in the spring. Here are a few more:

If autumn is windy, expect a mild winter.

If spring is windy, expect a cool summer.

It will be a wet summer if spring is dry.

A mild winter preceeds a cool spring.

A warm Christmas, a cold Easter.

Full moon in October without a frost,

No frost until November's full moon.

There was far too much information to include in one story. A second segment will follow in the Summer issue of this magazine dealing with predicting weather by animals, plants, and insects with more do-it-yourself weather experiments. ☼

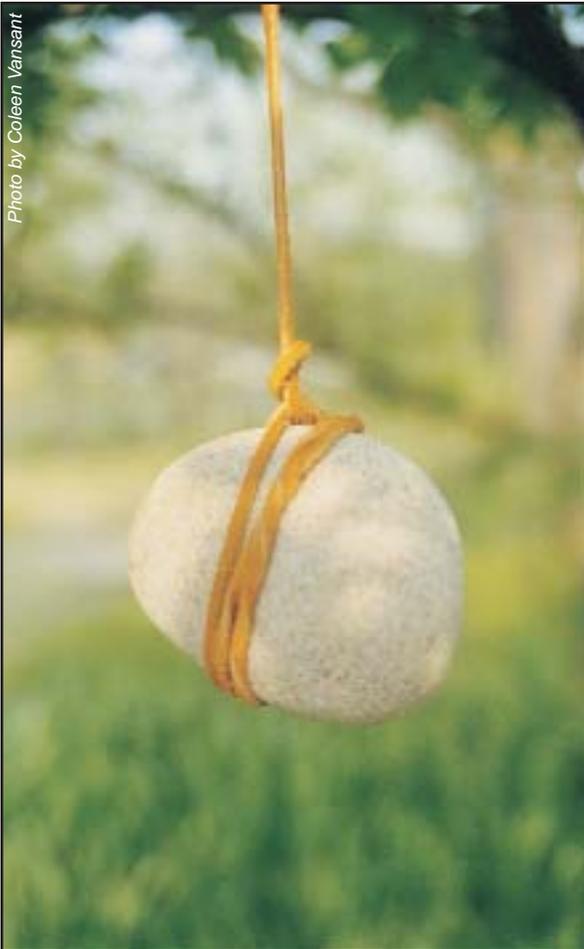


Photo by Coleen Varsant

Make Your Own "Weather Rock"

Tie a strip of leather or heavy twine around a smooth rock. Hang it in a tree or from a post, then watch for the following weather indicators.

If it's dry - the weather is clear.

If it's wet - it's raining.

If it's swaying back and forth - it's windy.

If it's casting a shadow - it's sunny.

If it's white - it's snowing.

If it's hard to see - it's foggy.

If it's cold - it's cold out.

If it's warm - it's warm out.

If it's gone - tornado.

Resources:

<http://www.reearthing.com/newpage2.htm>

http://www.essortment.com/weatherfolklore_ruao.htm

http://members.aol.com/Accustiver/wxworld_folk.html

<http://www.meds-sdmm.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/cmso/weatherlore.html>

<http://www.wrgb.com/wx/research/research.asp?Selection=folklore>

http://ashevillelist.com/weather_folk_sayings.htm

http://www.carolina.com/earth/weather_folklore.asp?print=yes

<http://www.stormfax.com/wxfolk.htm>

<http://ncnatural.com/wildflwr/fall/folklore.html>

<http://www.chestnut-sw.com/lore.htm>

<http://www.stalkingthewild.com/weather.htm>

The Foxfire Book, Anchor Books, 1972, New York