

The Met. Office

Observer's Handbook

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	Page 1
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CHAPTER 1

OBSERVATIONAL ROUTINE

1.1. Procedure at a full reporting station	3
1.2. Procedure at stations making abbreviated reports	6
1.3. Procedure at stations making special reports for aviation	6
1.4. Procedure at stations making plain-language weather reports	7
1.5. Procedure at climatological stations	7
1.6. General remarks on observing	8
1.7. Time standards and punctuality	9
1.8. Avoidance of errors	13
1.9. Observing at night	14
1.10. Care of instruments and equipment	14
1.11. Tabulation and custody of autographic records	17

CHAPTER 2

CLOUDS

2.1. Historical note	18
2.2. Observation of clouds	19
2.3. Classification of clouds	21
2.4. Cloud amount	29
2.5. Height of cloud base	31

CHAPTER 3

VISIBILITY

3.1. Introduction	43
3.2. Visibility objects	44
3.3. Determination of visibility during daylight	46
3.4. Determination of visibility at night	47
3.5. Vertical visibility	55
3.6. Runway visual range	56

CHAPTER 4

WEATHER

4.1. Nature of the observations	57
4.2. Descriptions of phenomena	58
4.3. Present weather	67
4.4. Past weather	72
4.5. Beaufort letters and international symbols	72

CHAPTER 5

WIND

5.1. General	80
5.2. Exposure of surface wind sensors	82
5.3. Estimation of wind direction and speed	84
5.4. Wind speed measurement	88
5.5. Wind direction measurement	91
5.6. Anemographs	91
5.7. The Meteorological Office Mk 5B wind system	94
5.8. Other wind systems	94

CHAPTER 6

STATE OF GROUND AND CONCRETE SLAB

	<i>Page</i>
6.1. General	95
6.2. State-of-ground scales	96
6.3. State of concrete slab	97

CHAPTER 7

ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE

7.1. General	98
7.2. Precision aneroid barometers	99
7.3. Mercury barometers	102
7.4. Checking barometer readings	105
7.5. Pressure at aerodrome level (QFE)	105
7.6. Altimeter setting (QNH)	106
7.7. Barographs	106

CHAPTER 8

TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY

8.1. Temperature scales	110
8.2. Thermometry	110
8.3. Thermometer screens	117
8.4. Standard thermometers in the screen	118
8.5. Thermometers exposed outside screens	125
8.6. Autographic instruments	129
8.7. Aspirated psychrometers	132

CHAPTER 9

PRECIPITATION

9.1. General requirements	135
9.2. Basic methods of measurement	135
9.3. Measuring precipitation by collection	137
9.4. Measurement of solid precipitation	142
9.5. Recording rain-gauges	144
9.6. Gravimetric rain-gauge	151
9.7. Measurement of snow depth	152

CHAPTER 10

SUNSHINE

10.1. General	153
10.2. Sunshine cards	154
10.3. Changing the card	154
10.4. Measuring the trace	156
10.5. Writing up the cards	158
10.6. Care of the recorder	158

CHAPTER 11

SPECIAL PHENOMENA

11.1. General	160
11.2. Photometeors	160
11.3. Special clouds	168
11.4. Electrometeors	170
11.5. Miscellaneous phenomena	173
11.6. Recording phenomena	175

APPENDICES

	<i>Page</i>
I. Requirements at observing stations	177
II. Recording of observations for climatological purposes at observing stations	200
III. Tables	204
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 213
INDEX	214

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

<i>Figure</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. Principle of cloud-height measurement with searchlight	34
2. Measurement of cloud base with searchlight	36
3. Meteorological Office cloud-base recorder system	42
4(a). Twilight }	53
4(b). Moonlight } nomograms of visibility of lights at night	54
4(c). Darkness }	55
5. Sample traces on a tilting-siphon rain-recorder chart	69
6. Specification of wind direction	81
7. Schematic drawing of precision aneroid barometer Mk 2	100
8. Kew-pattern barometer Mk 2	104
9. Standard types of thermometers	111, 112
10. Estimating tenths of a degree	115
11. Wet-bulb coverings	120
12. Approved types of rain-gauges	136
13. Reading the rain measure	139
14. Meteorological Office tilting-siphon rain recorder Mk 2	147
15(a). Tipping-bucket rain-gauge Mk 3	149
15(b). Tipping-bucket rain-gauge Mk 5	150
16. Cross-section of a sunshine recorder bowl	155
17. Diagram showing position of sunshine trace at different times of the year when the latitude setting of the instrument is correct	159
18. Halo phenomena	161
19. Auroral forms	172
20. Layout of an observing station	179
21. Isogonals or lines of equal westerly declination, 1977·5	182
22. Turf wall for use at exposed rain-gauge sites	189
23. Variations of the sun's altitude and azimuth	191-194

LIST OF PLATES

Plate		To face page
I.	{ Cirrus fibratus	between pages 26 and 27
	{ Cirrus uncinus	
II.	{ Cirrus intortus	
	{ Cirrocumulus lacunosus	
III.	{ Cirrocumulus undulatus	
	{ Cirrostratus with cirrus fibratus	
IV.	{ Cirrostratus nebulosus with halo	
	{ Altocumulus stratiformis, translucidus, perlucidus	
V.	{ Altocumulus lenticularis	
	{ Altocumulus floccus	
VI.	{ Altocumulus castellanus	
	{ Altocumulus and altostratus opacus, supplementary feature mamma	
VII.	{ Altostratus translucidus	
	{ Altostratus opacus	
VIII.	{ Nimbostratus with stratus fractus	
	{ Stratus fractus	
IX.	{ Stratus nebulosus, opacus	
	{ Stratocumulus stratiformis, perlucidus	
X.	{ Stratocumulus stratiformis, undulatus	
	{ Cumulus humilis	
XI.	{ Cumulus congestus	
	{ Cumulus mediocris	
XII.	{ Cumulonimbus congestus with cumulonimbus calvus	
	{ Cumulonimbus capillatus	
XIII.	{ Meteorological Office cloud searchlight	
	{ Meteorological Office alidade	
XIV.	{ Cloud-base recorder charts	
XV.	{ Meteorological Office visibility meter Mk 2	
XVI.	{ Soft rime	
	{ Glaze	
XVII.	{ Meteorological Office hand anemometer	
XVIII.	{ Meteorological Office electrical anemograph Mk 4	
XIX.	{ Electrical anemograph record	
XX.	{ Meter display for the Mk 5 wind system	
	{ Meteorological Office anemograph recorder Mk 5	
XXI.	{ Precision aneroid barometers Mk 1 and Mk 2	
XXII.	{ Static pressure head	
	{ Open-scale barograph	
XXIII.	{ Temperature indicator Mk 5	
XXIV.	{ Digital temperature indicator Mk 1A	
	{ Arrangements of instruments in a large thermometer screen	
XXV.	{ Large thermometer screen	
XXVI.	{ Bimetallic thermograph	
	{ Hair hygograph	
XXVII.	{ Aspirated psychrometer	
XXVIII.	{ Meteorological Office tilting-siphon rain recorder Mk 1	
XXIX.	{ Sunshine recorder Mk 2	
XXX.	{ Sunshine recorders Mk 3C	
XXXI.	{ Measurement of sunshine cards	

	between pages 106 and 107
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Plates I–V (upper), VII–X, XI (lower) and XII are by courtesy of Mr R. K. Pilsbury; Plates V (lower), VI (upper), XI (upper) and XVI are by courtesy of Mr S. D. Burt; Plate VI (lower) is by courtesy of Mr C. S. Broomfield; Plates XIII, XXV and XXX (lower) are by courtesy of the Photographic Section, RAF Benson; Plates XXIV (lower), XXVI and XXVIII are by courtesy of the Photographic Section, RAF Leuchars.

OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

Meteorological observations are made for a variety of reasons. Those observations made primarily for the purpose of providing information for weather forecasts are termed 'synoptic'. These synoptic observations are not by themselves sufficient to meet all the needs of, for example, agricultural meteorology, hydrology and industry. Hence, in the United Kingdom there is a further network of voluntary co-operating stations maintained by private individuals, schools and colleges, industrial concerns, local authorities, etc. whose records supplement those from the synoptic reporting stations. In addition there is a much larger number of 'rainfall stations' where the only records regularly maintained are those of rainfall.

The aim of all these observations is essentially to provide data. The differences between them arise mainly from the use to which the data are initially put. Synoptic observations are more frequent and more detailed, and are encoded for immediate transmission to forecasting centres. The other stations report in a manner suited to their particular function and ability, and are detailed below. All types of station should aim at high standards of accuracy, punctuality and instrument care. From this generalized classification there emerge five categories of station in the United Kingdom to which this handbook is addressed:

- (a) Synoptic stations whose primary function is to provide data for the forecasting service and for aviation purposes.
- (b) Auxiliary reporting stations also make observations which supplement the main network of synoptic stations. The number of observations made, and the type, vary according to a particular station's circumstances. The contributions may range from an observation every hour to one every three hours for a limited period.
- (c) Climatological stations are manned by voluntary co-operating observers who make a daily observation at 0900 GMT. These observations are not reported at the time but they make a significant contribution to the long-term climatological data for the British Isles.
- (d) Health Resort stations at which, in addition to the normal procedure of a climatological station, the observers make special reports at 6 p.m. clock time for inclusion in bulletins to the Press by the Meteorological Office.
- (e) Agricultural meteorological (agrometeorological) stations which are maintained for research and operational decisions on field-work (mostly by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food). These stations also make an 0900 GMT climatological observation.

The majority of the stations described above make an additional contribution in the form of climatological summaries which are completed monthly and, in some cases in an abbreviated form, weekly. The Meteorological

Office maintains a number of stations undertaking specialized functions which are outside the scope of this handbook; these include the Observatories and upper-air stations. The former have a multi-purpose role, making additional reports such as solar radiation, atmospheric pollution, evaporation, atmospheric electricity, etc. The upper-air stations make measurements of temperature, humidity and wind in the upper air, and some of these stations are involved in the location of thunderstorms, in solar radiation measurements and in surface observations.

This handbook has been based largely on guidance provided by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). In particular, much use has been made of the WMO *Guide to meteorological instrument and observing practices*, 1971, and the WMO *International cloud atlas*, Volume I, 1975.

It is assumed throughout this book that the observer is at a station which has been properly sited and equipped, on the scale appropriate to its type, and that the station is in full working order. Chapter 1 accordingly begins with a brief summary of the observing procedure at each type of station and gives some general notes on observing. The chapters which follow are devoted to the details of each type of observation. Reference is made to the use and maintenance of instruments where necessary in describing observational techniques. Since the previous (3rd) edition of this handbook was published some new instruments have been brought into routine use. These are described in general terms, but for more complete advice on instruments the reader is referred to the *Handbook of meteorological instruments* and either to the special maintenance instructions or the installation/operator instructions which are published by the Operational Instrumentation Branch of the Meteorological Office. The main text is followed by three Appendices, one of which gives directions for the selection of the site and for those other matters which must receive attention when the station is being set up; thus it is only occasionally necessary to refer to questions of exposure in the body of this book.

The metric (SI) system of units is becoming increasingly accepted in this country and is used throughout this edition. For a time Imperial units are likely to remain in use for some purposes, notably for reporting wind speed and cloud height. In these cases the Imperial units are added where these are considered important and informative.

Except where otherwise indicated, all times refer to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and are specified in the 24-hour system beginning at 0000. To emphasize the distinction between GMT and time by public clocks, the a.m. and p.m. system is used when reference is made to clock time. Adequate explanations accompany the few references made to other time standards, namely Local Zone Time and Local Apparent Time.

Details of the books mentioned throughout this handbook are given in the Bibliography on page 213.

Observers who still have a requirement for correction tables applicable to mercury barometers will need to retain the previous (3rd) edition of this handbook (see the introductory text in Appendix III, page 204).