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The Fools Guide to Predicting the Weather

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The Fool's Guide to Predicting the Weather

Sure everyone talks about the weather, but no one ever does anything about it. This used to be a joke, but let's face it, the earth is heating up and the National Weather Service nearly ran out of letters for naming hurricanes last year, yet people continue to drive their cars. Indeed the number one contributor of carbon in the atmosphere is combustion of fossil fuels. In honor of April Fools Day I take an unorthodox approach to measuring weather patterns. There must be endlessly creative ways of checking the weather. When the cat stops nagging you to be let out, it's obviously cooled off outside. Likewise, when ski apparel is half off by January, or you've been weeding your garden since February, you know that things are getting warm. To observe weather patterns one could monitor the sale of shaved ice month by month, take note of market reports for monthly sales of sun umbrellas, or try the following methods:

Glaciation and Precipitation

National Geographic (February 2006) painted a grim picture for the ski resorts across the European Alps. One private ski resort spent over $120,000 to cover the dark patches on their mountains with reflective blankets, and though skiing is all that some of these villages have ever known, half of these ski valleys may close within the next 20 years due to lack of snow. So checking ski conditions is not necessarily so foolish. During the ski season it is easy enough to find ski reports on weather sites such as The Weather Underground http://www.weatherunderground.com/, but if all you need is a ski report, then check out SkiReport.com http://skireport.com/. Reports are simple. You can find the base and recent powder for each region and ski basin.

The National Ski and Snowboarder's Association publishes several compilations of statistics each year on economic indicators of the industry. Two of them are for sale and the most comprehensive Cost of Doing Business Survey is probably located in your library, but not online. You can however find a chart showing previous years' participation in skiing and snow boarding through 2001. Snowboarding has been on the rise, especially for men as downhill skiing has declined somewhat. And while many of the ski resorts in New Mexico remain closed for 2006 and we are all convinced that global warming has dried up our slopes, the correlation remains fuzzy since the Northern Rockies are enjoying deep powder. Indeed the Global Warming: Early warning signs website, sponsored by several not-for-profit environmental groups, notes that a *fingerprint* of global warming is the evidence of melting mountain glaciers, http://www.climatehotmap.org/fingerprints.html
but adds on its *harbinger* page, http://www.climatehotmap.org/harbingers.html
that we can expect increased precipitation during the winter months at mid to high-level elevations and a general rise in sea-level. Fingerprints are phenomena that show historic evidence for global climate change, whereas harbingers are events predicted to be more widespread as warming patterns continue.

Better perhaps to look at precipitation and temperature patterns over the years. For patterns by state, try the National Climatic Data Center, specifically at http://lwf.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/research/cag3/state.html and then quickly click on your state before the flashing colors become too annoying. This is a great way to locate such trends in temperature and precipitation.

Storms

The year 2005 was the year that someone living near the Atlantic was most likely to bail water. How do we know there were 27 storms? Because of nomenclature. There were enough storms in 1955 that storms were named beginning with an S and a T, but only in 2005 did we get as far as Vince, Wilma and Alpha (why not Zelda?). It is not the mere quantity of storms that hit the Atlantic, but the severity, the number that occurred before July, and the percent of tropical storms that reached a hurricane rating.

For a summary of tropical cyclone monthly activity in the United States, visit the National Hurricane Center at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/archive/2005/tws/index.shtml, but for a much more readable summary, see Wikipedia's Atlantic hurricane season statistics, at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_Atlantic_hurricane_season_statistics#_note-0, one of the many discussions on meteorology that you might find at Wikipedia.

Groundhogs

If you rely on a groundhog to predict your winter weather then you'll want to visit the Shadow Report at:
http://www.gojp.com/groundhog/shadow.html
Legend has it that if the groundhog sees his shadow on Feb 2nd at approximately 7:30 AM we are headed for six more weeks of winter. Sadly though this chart *does* indicate whether or not "Phil" saw his shadow for about the last 50 years in Punxsutawney, PA, no one seems to have recorded whether or not Phil's prediction was accurate. Further, the geographic range of his "foreshadowing" remains unclear.