

Book review

The Wonders of the Weather by Bob Crowder (AGPS, 1995). ISBN 0644 35020 2. 270 pp., \$39.95.

Meteorology is boring. That's what I thought when I was at school. The subject took up a couple of weeks at Year 10 level. Describe Australia's climatic zones. Memorise the main cloud classifications. Differentiate between the appearance and properties of altocumulus and cirrostratus.

The texts were pretty dull as well. Page after page of black and white photos to facilitate the identification of the aforementioned clouds, a few synoptic charts and several hundred pages (or so it seemed) on climate patterns of the world.

Had Bob Crowder's *The Wonders of the Weather* been our reference, meteorology would have been a different proposition. To prepare a 270-page, comprehensive but readable account of meteorology and weather forecasting is a major undertaking. Bob, who retired seven years ago as Deputy Director of the Bureau of Meteorology, has performed the task with flair. Enthusiasm for the subject and commitment to scientific accuracy permeate every page.

The Wonders of the Weather begins with an explanation of how our seasons arise and then progresses to wind systems great and small via radiation, general circulation and the weather map. Meteorological measurements are described and explanations presented of a diverse and interesting range of weather-related phenomena. The book includes a fascinating account of the development of forecasting, from Aristotle to satellites and supercomputers, and concludes with a chapter on myths, facts and fallacies.

Atmospheric science has become very topical during the last decade. As you might expect, Crowder deftly describes the enhanced greenhouse effect, ozone depletion, urban air pollution and El Niño.

Information that adds to and enlivens the chapter text is given in boxes. In the chapter on tem-

perature, humidity and human comfort you will find items on swing bowling and heavy atmospheres, the great heat-wave of 1939, world and Australian temperature extremes, and what can be gleaned weather-wise from a prostrate cow. All the information you *need* is here as well as all the material you *want*. Such as which way water swirls down southern hemispheric plug holes, whether Sydney is wetter than Melbourne and why discerning football followers hate Melbourne's AFL Park.

The conversational and often witty writing style maintains the reader's attention. Liberally sprinkled throughout are snippets of poetry, delightful in their own right and reminders of the eternal fascination of weather and its influences. The quality of illustrations and photographs is generally superb, although the Australian climate maps could be a little clearer. A surprising omission from Crowder's book is cloud seeding, especially as it is a topic that has generated so much public interest since the 1950s.

Overall, *The Wonders of the Weather* is outstanding. Bob Crowder has managed to create an indispensable reference for upper secondary and first-year meteorology students, a source of valuable information for practitioners and a thoroughly enjoyable read for anyone interested in learning about weather.

So popular has the book been that AGPS refused this journal a review copy! No doubt many readers will already own *The Wonders of the Weather*. If you don't, rush to your nearest AGPS outlet and buy yourself a copy. You won't regret it.

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