

THE WEATHER OUTLOOK

on Wednesday, April 3

Perfect closing weekend

by Gary Sprung



Fred Garing's skis lost in the fluff on Horseshoe Springs on Friday.

--Photo by Gnurps

AH! SUCH WONDERFUL POWDER for the second to last week of the ski season. From Tuesday through Sunday the ski area got 34 inches. Here's how it happened:

The first flakes of Tuesday (1½ weeks ago) grew into Wednesday's blizzard because the upper air winds carried moisture in from west-southwest, and later from due west--our heavy snow directions. Over 90% of the country winds at 34,000 feet were greater than 50 knots. By Thursday morning 15 inches had fallen in 24 hours, the largest single-day snowfall of Crested Butte's season.

The front that set up during this event was aligned parallel to the jet stream, so the upper winds did not push it along. The front became stationary, yielding constant, light snowfall into Thursday for another four inches.

By Friday the long-wave pattern dropped into a steep trough, with jet winds due due north to south in Utah, turning in New Mexico, then due south to north in the Plains. That steep turn in the southern Rockies set up a slow-moving, but powerful surface low over Albuquerque.

For the first time of the season, an upslope storm flowed in over the window offered by low-elevation North/Cochetopa Pass in the southeast corner of the Gunnison country. Counter-clockwise circulation of the Albuquerque low created southeast winds on the north side of that low. The storm flowed up the San Luis Valley, across that low spot in the Continental Divide, then dumped on Fossil Ridge and Crested Butte. Result: another full-day storm with eight fresh inches.

Then the long-wave moved eastward, shifting the trough to the southern Plains; so Saturday was less snowy with wind out of the northwest. On Sunday a last shot of moisture came in on the still-strong northwesterly jet with a last four inches.

The trough will soon move further east, but for now, Wednesday evening, a cold front is passing over with winds still out of the northwest.

Lightening and thunder! Our first for 1985 came with this front. The moisture for this event came from the jet heading down from Idaho and Washington, plus a spurt of subtropical flow from the southwest. The day's strong heating combined with those flows to create enough convective uplift to cause a thunderstorm.

Though we would expect little more than a trace from this northwest pattern, the strong convection may yield more by Friday morning.

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By Friday night the long-wave pattern will be far enough east that we will be more in the center of the ridge which now stands over the West Coast. So Saturday should be crystal clear with highs in the 40's, maybe up to 50 or 55 by Sunday. Nights won't go below 15 this weekend. After that, the warming, drying trend should continue.

There's a slight chance of another surge of subtropical moisture from the southwest on Monday or later. Otherwise, expect perfect spring weather!

Accuracy rating for last week: 75%.

Long-wave pattern expected Sunday through Wednesday





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