

Report on Project Atmosphere July 2010

Alexander (Sandy) Adamson
High Park School
Stony Plain, Alberta

From 18 to 30 July 2010, I experienced two weeks of the hottest temperatures on record for July in Kansas City. Even better than that, I was a lucky participant in Project Atmosphere 2010, the American Meteorological Society's (AMS) Summer Workshop. At the workshop were gathered 15 American teachers and two Canadians, myself included. The other Canadian, Rosalie Schop, is a young Nova Scotian who just finished teaching her first year in Kimmirut, Nunavut. Rosalie was sent to Project Atmosphere by STAR, which stands for Storm Tracking in the Arctic. They are partners in developing part of the weather component for the new grade 12 science course in Nunavut.

I teach grade 5 in Stony Plain, Alberta. In Alberta "weather" makes up 20% of our grade 5 Science curriculum. It can be a fun unit and I am pleased that it is part of what I get to teach. I will say that now I will be teaching weather with a whole new outlook (and expertise). There were many strong presentations at the workshop on a great variety of weather topics.

The participants were a strong group of teachers from around North America. The teachers from the south-east had hurricane and heat wave stories. The teachers from the Plains had tornado and hail storm stories. The folks from New England had experienced some strong nor'easters (and Alberta, to them, was the source of the Alberta Clippers they dislike so much). The teachers from Arizona and New Mexico had drought stories. As Canadians we brought our stories of ten months of winter and two months of bad skating. Everybody had lived through interesting weather and everybody enjoyed teaching about weather.

A typical day would include presentations on a theme (like "highs and lows" or "hurricanes"). The presentations were quite thorough and were either presented by one of the very capable Project Atmosphere instructors or by very qualified guest speakers. We received presentations from people like Dr. Louis W. Uccellini (Director of the National Weather Service!) and Bill Read (Director of the National Hurricane Center!). Hearing from some of the top weather people in the US was an honour and a treat.

Each day we would also typically work with a Project Atmosphere Module (PAM). These are educational materials designed to help teach weather concepts to adults. We learned a great deal from the PAMs and they will be very useful when we run our own weather workshops. We worked through PAMs on topics such as El Niño/La Niña, hurricanes, clouds, weather satellites, weather radar, thunderstorms, jet streams,

snowstorms, etc. Although some of these may not be applicable to my grade 5's they were very interesting and my high school colleagues will enjoy them. The modules will need no adaptation for our workshops although some of them will need some tweaking before I use them in class.

A highlight of each day was our trip down the hallway to get our daily weather briefing. For the first few days part of the excitement was finding our way through the warren of corridors at the National Weather Service Training Center (NWSTC). Even after we became accustomed to the building we very much enjoyed hearing from Jerry, a very experienced and knowledgeable forecaster, as he showed us a variety of radar and weather maps. We were shown the prognostications of various climate models. He made sure that everyone knew what was happening "back home" for all of the participants.

One day we took a road trip to Topeka, Kansas. There is a local National Weather Service office in Topeka and we showed up to see local forecasters in their native habitat. We also got to see them release a weather balloon which rose high above the corn fields and drifted out of sight. The next day we got to see data collected and transmitted by "our" weather balloon. The Topeka field trip was a highlight. We all enjoyed when, at the end of the trip, we travelled across the Missouri River back into the state of Missouri and we could say, "We are not in Kansas anymore."

Our evenings were mostly our own and I got a chance to see the local Major League Soccer team play (and beat) Manchester United (from the UK) in Arrowhead Stadium. The next night 12 of us went and watched the worst defeat in Kansas City Royals history (19-1 loss to the Twins). Another evening all 17 teachers went to a very nice downtown barbecue restaurant. Our days were full and our free time was fun.

The hotel we stayed in was great. It was about a hundred-metre walk to the NWSTC where we spent our days. It was, however, quite far from downtown Kansas City. Some teachers had vehicles and served as taxis. All 17 teachers were very glad they attended.

I feel very honoured to have attended Project Atmosphere. I am grateful to the Canadian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society and the Canadian Council for Geographic Education (CCGE) for sending me to Project Atmosphere 2010.

(some photos follow)



Alexander (Sandy) Adamson





