



## SEASONS OF THE DESERT

### Winter – Reading the Weather

The American Southwest is well known for its great climate. For the majority of the year, temperatures are warm, and skies are clear. This does not mean, of course, that there is no variety in the weather. Summer thunderstorms can be quite violent, and winter snows are not unheard of. A basic knowledge of meteorology can help us plan our daily activities more wisely.

#### Clouds

There are three main cloud types: cirrus (wispy), stratus (layered), and cumulus (puffy).

Cirrus clouds may indicate nothing more than high altitude winds, but if they create a halo around the sun or moon it is probably the first sign of approaching bad weather.

Stratus clouds imply that precipitation is likely.

Cumulus clouds generally hint at clear weather, unless they begin to rise and darken.

Cloud names that include the name “nimbus” always imply rain.

#### Winds

Fair weather usually comes with northwest, west, or southwest winds. Winds from the northeast, east, or south, bring unsettled weather.

#### Barometric Pressure

A falling barometer means low pressure is coming, bringing changes in the weather. A rising barometer indicates high pressure, and good weather, is on the way. If the barometer hasn't changed recently, the weather will continue as is.

#### Relative Humidity

Humidity is the percentage of moisture in the air. The higher the humidity, the more likely it is to rain.

#### Be Your Own Weather Bureau

Depending on where you live, there may not be an accurate local forecast. Then it may be worthwhile to set up a small weather station. No fancy instruments are required, but these basic ones will be helpful.

Thermometer – there are several types available. The cheapest is the small mercury-type, but units that show high/low or indoor/outdoor temperatures are handy.

Barometer – probably the most important instrument to have, there are several different types available.

Wind speed and direction – weather vanes can be as simple as wetting a finger and holding it up to see which side becomes cool. An anemometer shows wind speed.

Humidity – relative humidity can be easily determined using a sling psychrometer or a hygrometer. A rain gauge is also worth investing in.

#### Weather Signs in the Outdoors

Jet contrails show humidity and wind conditions in the upper atmosphere. A long trail infers high humidity. A short trail indicates drier, more stable conditions. The trail will linger in one piece if the winds are from one direction, but will break up if wind direction changes.