

HURRICANE HUGO – SEPTEMBER 1989

This dramatic view of the approach and aftermath of hurricane Hugo was passed to us by Ann Welch of Farnham, Surrey. The account is extracted from the log of Hugh Whistler on Tortola in the British Virgin Islands (BVI). At the time, Mr Whistler was responsible for the construction of a marina village.

We learnt from US weather satellites and airforce spotter planes flown out of Antigua and Puerto Rico that *Hugo* was heading our way. It was given as a 200-mile diameter tropical storm with winds of over 100 mph moving in a westerly direction at some 300 miles a day.

14 September. Hurricane Alert. *Hugo* could pose a threat to us if it swung northwards.

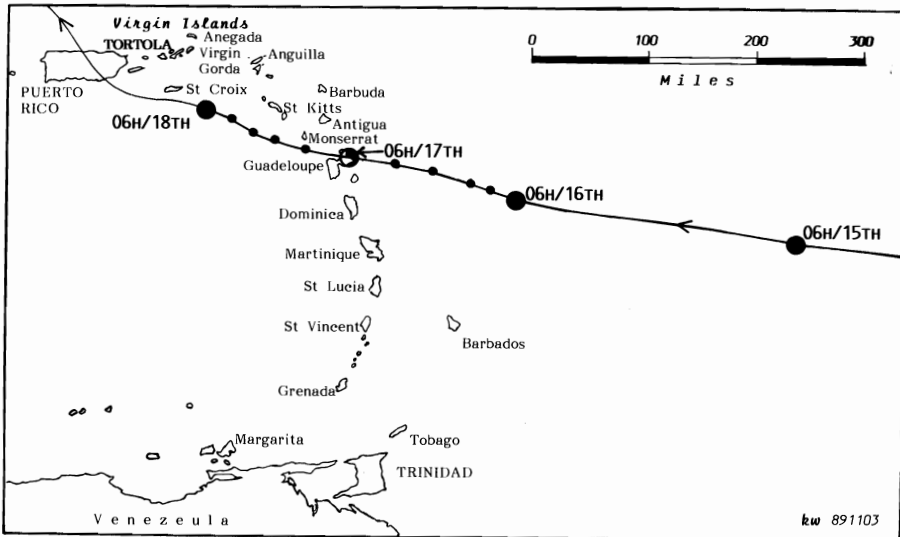
15 September. Hurricane warning. Time to make preparations. Cleared all loose material on construction sites. Braced and bolted down new roof going up at Tropic Aisle site. Not much we could do at village. Bought a few extra supplies and batteries in town and headed home to start moving plants.

16 September. Pool cover on, shutters ready, terrace furniture inside. Warnings of 8-ft tidal rise so secured boat to 20-ft steel container in case she floated off the trailer.

17 September. *Hugo* hit Guadeloupe badly and went on to destroy Montserrat and damage 90 per cent of Dominica's banana crop – their chief income. Eye of storm 40 miles across. 140–175 mph winds, with 120 mph winds for 100 miles around. *Hugo* was going to hit us.

2pm all electricity turned off to save equipment, and so that all lines would be dead when they fell. Roaring strong northerly winds all night. Branches breaking; some rain but not so much as expected.

18 September. Wind suddenly switched to east, roaring along and up from other side of the house tearing off most of the roof shingles, all front gutters and half the car port roof. Pickup windscreen hit by tree. As dawn came could not see a nearby house, but as rain eased could see it but not its yellow roof. Trees smashed everywhere, stumps left, no leaves



The track of hurricane Hugo, 14–19 September 1989, based on a sketch map by Mr Whistler

on plants or rest of hillside. Turpentine tree down but pool covers still on. Thought Dorans house OK but later, when possible to open bathroom windows, realised the front half had disappeared. Too windy to move outside yet. Water everywhere, through louvre windows – though surprisingly none broken. Sliding glass-door partially opened with frame bent 4 inches but glass did not crack. Suddenly, shutters burst inwards despite extra wiring. Could close one but not both, even with feet braced against door. Pushed rope around grill and shutter bolt and gradually roped them together but the crack sufficient to let in water and masses of shredded leaves – a green mess everywhere.

Phone dead all night but at 0800 it suddenly rang. An aunt from Philadelphia; are we OK? Just time to tell her 'yes'; shaken but wet when the phone goes dead as the wind howls past.

Strong winds until 3pm. More heavy rain so still could not start cutting our way out.

19 September. Cut away enough to get out of house with help. Drove to Long Bay to get to site. Little Apple Bay a mess of poles, wires, trees. Cliff cottages' roofs lying in road. Impassable all the way to Long Bay hotel. Five cottages demolished. Walked through flooded golf course to site – OK; a few trees down but no damage. West End road destroyed, Towers road impassable, boat OK. Gordon road cleared after minor slides due to 4–5 inches of rain instead of the expected 10.

26 September. One week later. BVI not really as bad as expected or as hard hit as other poor islands. Power on in Roadtown but not us yet. Struggling with generator and gas lamps. House dry and clean. Starting our roof repairs tomorrow, having done local house roofs in village. Roadtown messy but, except for boats ashore and roofs of the Virgin Queen restaurant and the income tax office completely off, not too much damage. Altogether 200 houses damaged with 20 roofs lost, and about 12 destroyed. 80 boats ashore, 10 in Trellis Bay from moorings; 14 from Sopers Hole – most not found yet. Everyone worked hard the first few days and there was a cheerful spirit especially among those with damage. There was none of the dreadful looting as in St Thomas and St Croix where they had to call in the marines – and still have a 6pm-to-6am curfew, with no one allowed out. Will be back to normal soon if we can get the West End road fixed!

MEETING REPORT

SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCHOOL AND POPULAR
METEOROLOGICAL AND OCEANOGRAPHIC EDUCATION
Crystal City, Virginia, USA, 12–16 July 1989.

The first of these conferences was held in Oxford five years previously, and was reported in *Weather*, 39, pp.384–387. The second attracted 189 participants from 15 countries, though the vast majority were from the USA. About 90 per cent of the Americans were pre-college teachers, many of whom had received financial assistance from the USA's National Science Foundation. So, there was a very strong American high-school flavour.

In addition to the more formal opening and closing sessions, there were, including demonstrations, about 85 papers covering virtually all aspects of teaching weather to non-specialists, but there was little coverage of oceanographic education. The American Meteorological Society (AMS) published the preprints of almost all the papers in time for the Conference, and this 171-page paperback is available from the AMS at 45 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass. 02108, USA (price \$30).

We were informed early in the Conference that US students were weak in science and mathematics (so, too, are most of the British). Consequently, many speakers emphasised that teaching about the weather was a very good way to introduce people to science in a way that can be great fun! Meteorology not only illustrates many physical principles but is very relevant to everyday life, in that the weather affects many of the activities we all perform regularly. Also it is very amenable to the 'hands on' approach, for simple (and cheap) experiments can be devised for students of all ages. The weather is also an excellent essay topic for English courses and, in the right hands, this too can lead to a stimulation of interest in the subject itself.

Many of the papers and demonstrations were as exciting to the participants as they must be