

Ship Report Transcript

Monday, August 19, 2024

By Joanne Rideout

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It's time for the Ship Report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. It's Monday, August 19th, 2024.

In our marine weather forecast, we have low pressure over the northeastern Pacific that will maintain southerly winds over our waters through mid-week seas will be predominantly wind driven. High pressure rebuilds on Wednesday night, returning northerly winds. So we have south winds today 10 to 15 knots, gusting to 20. Seas 3 to 4 feet. Wave details. Waves from the south four feet high at 5 seconds apart. And from the northwest, two feet high at 9 seconds apart. We have a slight chance of showers in the morning and then a chance of showers in the afternoon.

Well, we're back to rainy and kind of blustery weather. And it's the first inklings that fall is just around the corner. We'll be entering meteorological autumn in about two weeks at the beginning of September, and the weather will be seesawing back and forth between summery and autumn until it finally settles into our typical rainy, gray fall and winter pattern as we start seeing increased winds and that autumn feeling closes in. It always reminds me of the Beaufort wind scale, which is something quite important for mariners.

And so around this time of year, I like to talk about that as we approach fall. The Beaufort wind scale is a wind scale still in use today, that was invented in 1805 by a UK Royal Navy officer named Sir Francis Beaufort.

I talk about this scale here on the show often, especially during the fall, winter and spring, because it's still in use today and it's an interesting and practical view of the effects of wind. And it dates from a time way before all the modern technology that we rely on. So heavily these days. So it's kind of a back to basics kind of way of evaluating the sea in weather conditions based upon what you can see happening around you.

The Beaufort Scale describes the strength of the wind based on its effects on the surrounding sea state and also on land. So before we had modern wind instruments to measure wind speed, the scale helped mariners and people on land figure out how intense a weather system was by its effect on our surroundings. The scale goes from Force 0 being dead, calm to Force 12 being a hurricane. The history surrounding the scale and earlier and later versions of it is kind of interesting and fun.

Part of the fun here comes from the other versions of the scale that I came across when I was researching it. The idea of using effects you can see around you to create a usable wind scale has been around a long time because it's all people really had before the Beaufort wind scale was invented.

There was an earlier scale invented in 1704 by a man named Daniel Defoe. It included words that sailors commonly used then to define the intensity of breezes and higher winds. It wasn't very precise, but like all these scales, they started come winds and go up to crazy. So here's a little bit from the Defoe scale of winds from 1704, 0 is considered stark calm. Five is considered a fresh gale. Six a topsail gale, Level nine is a fret of wind. That's my personal favorite. And 11 is a tempest, the highest level of that scale.

Now, Beaufort's scale, as we now know, it evolved from other skills like these. And one updated version created by Beaufort in 1831 included how sailing vessels should respond in winds, depending on where they were on the scale.

So if you look at Beaufort's 1831 version of the wind scale for sailors, light air is level one just efficient to give steerage way. When you get up to storm level, you would say that that is where the ship would reduce her sails to storm stay sails. And when you get up to 12 - hurricane that's described as that which no canvas could withstand, this is called running bare poles, meaning no sails up at all.

You may have heard of that. Some really bad storms, sailors sail sailing vessels just take down all of their sails to reduce wind resistance. And they just basically go with the flow until the wind peters out. And in that case, they just kind of get blown wherever the wind takes them. If you're out in the open ocean, that as long as you can kind of keep your seat with the boat, you not have problems. You can just wait until the storm blows itself out. Now, the Beaufort wind scaled today.

Today we have anemometers that measure the wind speed. But the original idea for this scale was that observations, wind observations by the officer of the watch on board a ship usually referred to the state of the sea. So let's take a look at that. Zero, of course, is calm. The sea is like a mirror and is smooth, you see, rises vertically. Force 3 are referred to as forces in the scale. Large wavelets crests begin to break foam or glassy appearance on the water lea on land leaves and small twigs in constant motion. Wind extends light flags.

At higher force levels, large waves begin to form. The white foam crests are more extensive everywhere. Probably some spray. And when you get up to the level of a gale, which we get quite often here in the wintertime, moderate high waves of greater length edges of crests begin to break into "spindrift" - I love that word - where the tops of the waves are blown off into streaks that marks the direction of the wind and on land. Twigs break from trees. It can be difficult to walk in gale force winds.

And when you get up to hurricane force winds, the air is filled with foam and spray. The sea is completely white with driving spray and visibility is very seriously affected. You really don't want to be out in a hurricane if you can help it in any vessel and on land, of course, widespread damage. And here's another here's another scale that I found. This one was apparently put together for fun.

Level one is reading a newspaper out of doors becomes a problem because of the breeze when you get to eight car steering seems to have gone wrong. Number nine - old ladies hats blown away. 11 old ladies and old gentlemen are blown away.

And then finally, the Cruising Yachtsmen Scale, which includes actions a vessel could take in a given wind intensity and the crew's reaction to the wind at level two mild pleasure at for great pleasure at six delight tinged with anxiety. And when you get up to force ten - survival conditions and panic.

So there you have it, a short history of wind tables that are based on what's happening around you on on land. So next time we get heavy winds, you can look on the Beaufort wind scale. There is the modern ones are keyed to levels of the knots. How many knots winds are blowing and you can maybe see how high the winds are going to be blowing. You take a look around you in your neighborhood to see how to see what's happening. Are the trees flailing around or branches breaking of trees - and see if you can match it with the Beaufort wind scale. That's always kind of a fun thing to do.

So that's a bit about the table of wind speed that we now call the Beaufort Wind scale. It's clear that for most of us except experienced and hardy mariners, winds of of about Force 6 on the Beaufort wind scale that brings 8 to 13 foot waves and whitecaps and spray - probably means that we should just stay home.

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