

THE WEATHER OF THE YUKON, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AND WESTERN NUNAVUT



GRAPHIC AREA FORECAST 35



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by

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Graphic Area Forecast 35

Preface

For NAV CANADA's Flight Service Specialists (FSS), providing weather briefings to help pilots navigate through the day-to-day fluctuations in the weather is a critical role. While available weather products are becoming increasingly more sophisticated and at the same time more easily understood, an understanding of local and regional climatological patterns is essential to the effective performance of this role.

This Yukon, Northwest Territories and western Nunavut Local Area Aviation Weather Knowledge manual is one of a series of six publications prepared by the Meteorological Service of Canada (MSC) for NAV CANADA. Each of the six manuals corresponds to a specific graphic forecast area (GFA) domain, with the exception of the Nunavut - Arctic manual that covers the combined GFA 36 and 37 domains. These manuals form an important part of the training program on local aviation weather knowledge for FSS working in the area and a useful tool in the day-to-day service delivery by FSS.

Within the GFA domains, the weather shows strong climatological patterns controlled either by season or topography. This manual describes the weather of the GFACN35 (Yukon - Northwest Territories - western Nunavut). From the treeless tundra of the northeastern reaches of the GFA 35 domain, to the ice and seas of the Beaufort, to the mountains of the Yukon and western Mackenzie, season and topography play their role in local flying conditions.

This manual provides some insight on specific weather effects and patterns in this area. While a manual cannot replace intricate details and knowledge of the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and western Nunavut that FSS and experienced pilots of the area have acquired over the years, this manual is a collection of such knowledge taken from interviews with local pilots, dispatchers, Flight Service Specialists, National Park Wardens and MSC personnel.

By understanding the weather and hazards in the GFA 35 domain, FSS will be more able to assist pilots to plan their flights in a safe and efficient manner. While this is the manual's fundamental purpose, NAV CANADA recognizes the value of the information collected for pilots themselves. More and better information on weather in the hands of pilots will always contribute to aviation safety. For that reason, the manuals are being made available to NAV CANADA customers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This manual was made possible through funding by NAV CANADA, Flight Information Centre project office.

The PAAWC meteorologists advise that are indebted to the Edmonton-based climate specialists Patrick Kyle and Monique Lapalme for the myriad of weather statistics that they produced in support of this manual.

NAV CANADA would like to thank the Meteorological Service of Canada (MSC), both national and regional personnel, for working with us to compile the information for each Graphic Area Forecast (GFA) domain, and present it in a user friendly professional format. Special thanks go to Ross Klock and John Mullock, Mountain Weather Centre, Kelowna, and to Ed Hudson, and his fellow meteorologists John Alexander, Alex Fisher, David Aihoshi, and Paul Yang of the Prairie Aviation and Arctic Weather Centre (PAAWC), Edmonton. Ross' expertise of the Yukon and Ed's and his fellow PAAWC meteorologists' expertise of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut has been instrumental for the development of this Yukon, Northwest Territories and western Nunavut document. PAAWC meteorologists Lydna Schuler and Paul Yang, through their diligent editing, contributed significantly to the manuals' content thereby becoming de facto authors. The PAAWC meteorologists advise that they are indebted to the Edmonton-based climate specialists Patrick Kyle and Monique Lapalme for the myriad of weather statistics that they produced for this manual. John Mullock's experience and efforts have ensured high quality and consistent material from Atlantic to Pacific to Arctic.

This endeavour could not have been as successful without the contributions of many people within the aviation community. We would like to thank all the participants that provided information through interviews with MSC, including pilots, dispatchers, Flight Service Specialists, and National Park Wardens.

Their willingness to share their experiences and knowledge contributed greatly to the success of this document.

Roger M. Brown, May, 2002

Readers are invited to submit any comments to:

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S E R V I N G A W O R L D I N M O T I O N

A U S E R V I C E D ' U N M O N D E E N M O U V E M E N T

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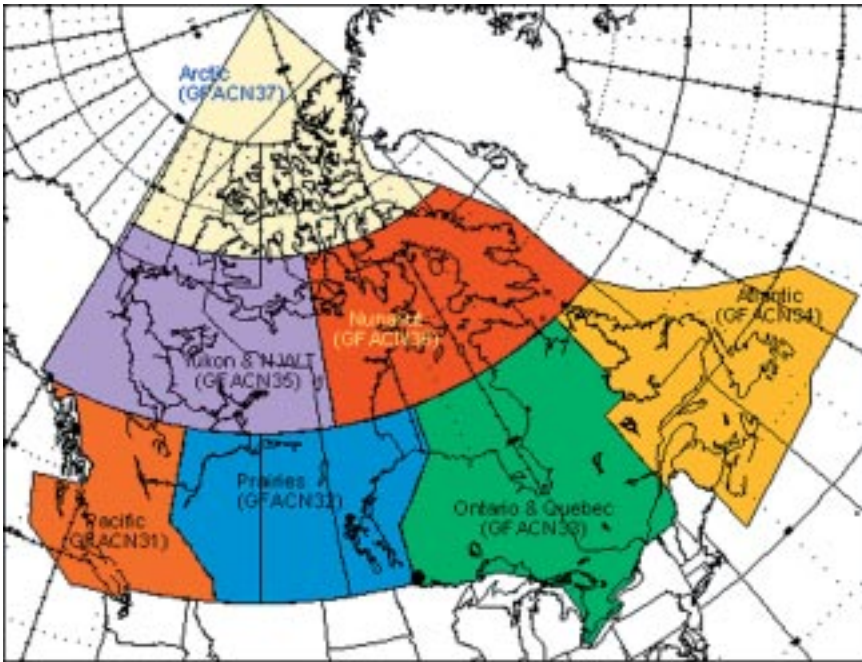
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Introduction

Meteorology is the science of the atmosphere, a sea of air that is in a constant state of flux. Within it storms are born, grow in intensity as they sweep across sections of the globe, then dissipate. No one is immune to the day-to-day fluctuations in the weather, especially the aviator who must operate within the atmosphere.

Traditionally, weather information for the aviation community has largely been provided in textual format. One such product, the area forecast (FA), was designed to provide the forecast weather for the next twelve hours over a specific geographical area. This information consisted of a description of the expected motion of significant weather systems, the associated clouds, weather and visibility.

In April 2000, the Graphical Area Forecast (GFA) came into being, superseding the area forecast. A number of MSC Forecast Centres now work together, using graphical software packages, to produce a single national graphical depiction of the forecast weather systems and the associated weather. This single national map is then partitioned into a number of GFA Domains for use by Flight Service Specialists, flight dispatchers and pilots.



GFA Domains

This Yukon, Northwest Territories and western Nunavut Local Area Knowledge Aviation Weather Manual is one of a series of six similar publications. All are produced by NAV CANADA in partnership with the MSC. These manuals are designed to provide a resource for Flight Service Specialists and pilots to help with the understanding of local aviation weather. Each of the six manuals corresponds to a specific graphic forecast area (GFA) domain, with the exception of the Nunavut - Arctic manual that covers the combined GFA 36 and 37 domains. MSC aviation meteorologists provide most of the broader scale information on meteorology and weather systems affecting the various domains. Experienced pilots who work in or around weather on a daily basis, however, best understand the local weather. Interviews with local pilots, dispatchers, Flight Service Specialists, and National Park Wardens form the basis for the information presented in Chapter 4.

Within the domains, the weather shows strong climatological patterns that are controlled either by season or topography. For example, in British Columbia there is a distinctive difference between the moist coastal areas and the dry interior because of the mountains. The weather in the Arctic varies strongly seasonally between the frozen landscape of winter and the open water of summer. These changes are important in understanding how the weather works and each book will be laid out so as to recognize these climatological differences.

This manual describes the weather of the GFACN35 Yukon, Northwest Territories and western Nunavut. This area often has beautiful flying weather but challenging conditions frequently occur, particularly in the fall and winter. As most aviators in the region can attest, these variation in flying weather can take place quite abruptly. From the flat treeless barrens of the northeastern reaches of the GFACN35 domain to the mountains of the western Mackenzie and Yukon, local topography plays a key role in determining both the general climatology and local flying conditions in a particular region. Statistically, approximately 30% of aviation accidents are weather related and up to 75% of delays are due to weather.

This manual is “instant knowledge” about how the weather behaves in the GFA35 domain in a general sense. It is not “experience” and it is not the actual weather of a given day or weather system. The information presented in this manual is by no means exhaustive. The variability of local aviation weather in the Yukon Northwest Territories and western Nunavut could result in a larger publication. However, by understanding some of the weather and hazards in these areas, pilots may be able to relate the hazards to topography and weather systems in areas not specifically mentioned.

Chapter 1

Basics of Meteorology

To properly understand weather, it is essential to understand some of the basic principles that drive the weather machine. There are numerous books on the market that describe these principles in great detail with varying degrees of success. This section is not intended to replace these books, but rather to serve as a review.

Heat Transfer and Water Vapour

The atmosphere is a "heat engine" that runs on one of the fundamental rules of physics: excess heat in one area (the tropics) must flow to colder areas (the poles). There are a number of different methods of heat transfer but a particularly efficient method is through the use of water.

Within our atmosphere, water can exist in three states depending on its energy level. Changes from one state to another are called phase changes and are readily accomplished at ordinary atmospheric pressures and temperatures. The heat taken in or released during a phase change is called latent heat.

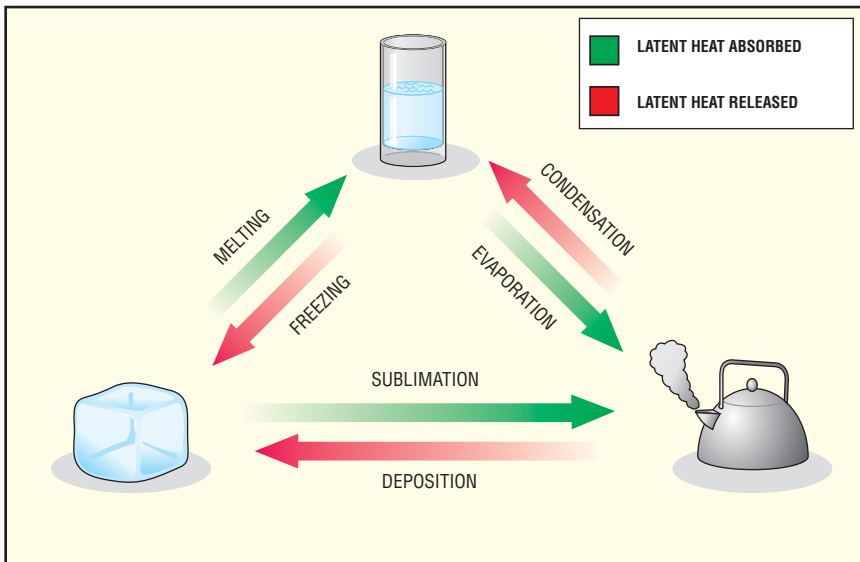


Fig. 1-1 - Heat transfer and water vapour

How much water the air contains in the form of vapour is directly related to its temperature. The warmer the air, the more water vapour it can contain. Air that contains its maximum amount of water vapour, at that given temperature, is said to be saturated. A quick measure of the moisture content of the atmosphere can be made

by looking at the dew point temperature. The higher (warmer) the dew point temperature, the greater the amount of water vapour.

The planetary heat engine consists of water being evaporated by the sun into water vapour at the equator (storing heat) and transporting it towards the poles on the winds where it is condensed back into a solid or liquid state (releasing heat). Most of what we refer to as "weather," such as wind, cloud, fog and precipitation is related to this conversion activity. The severity of the weather is often a measure of how much latent heat is released during these activities.

Lifting Processes

The simplest and most common way water vapour is converted back to a liquid or solid state is by lifting. When air is lifted, it cools until it becomes saturated. Any additional lift will result in further cooling which reduces the amount of water vapour the air can hold. The excess water vapour is condensed out in the form of cloud droplets or ice crystals which then can go on to form precipitation. There are several methods of lifting an air mass. The most common are convection, orographic lift (upslope flow), frontal lift, and convergence into an area of low pressure.

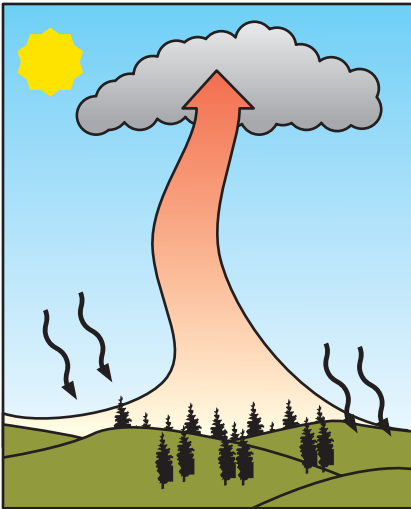


Fig. 1-2 - Convection as a result of daytime heating

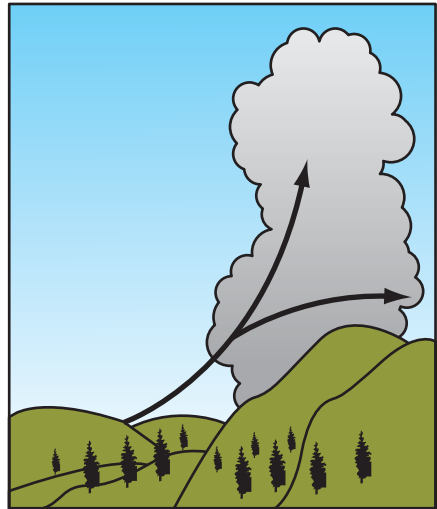


Fig.1-3 - Orographic (upslope) lift

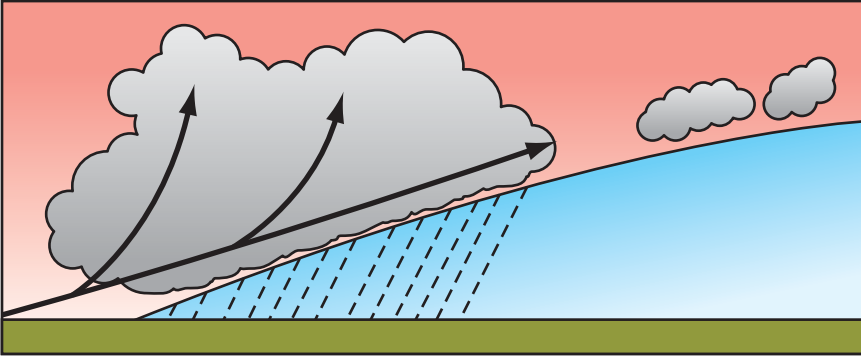


Fig.1-4 - Warm air overrunning cold air along a warm front

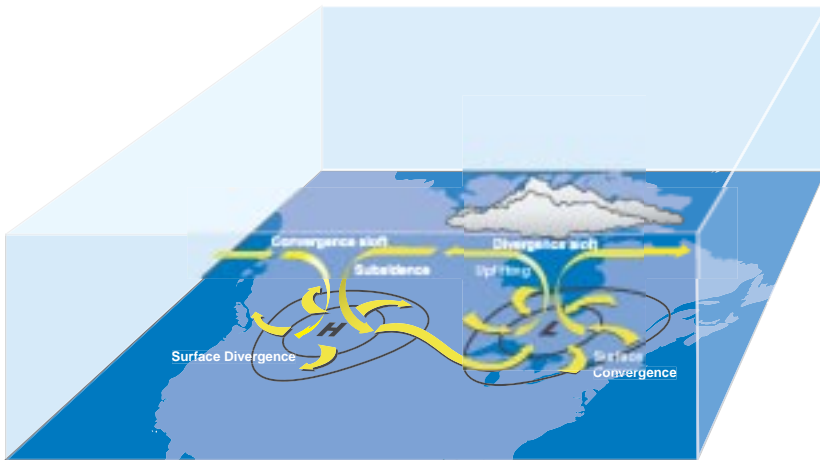


Fig. 1-5 - Divergence and convergence at the surface and aloft in a high low couplet

Subsidence

Subsidence, in meteorology, refers to the downward motion of air. This subsiding motion occurs within an area of high pressure, as well as on the downward side of a range of hills or mountains. As the air descends, it is subjected to increasing atmospheric pressure and, therefore, begins to compress. This compression causes the air's temperature to increase which will consequently lower its relative humidity. As a result, areas in which subsidence occurs will not only receive less precipitation than surrounding areas (referred to as a "rain shadow") but will often see the cloud layers thin and break up.

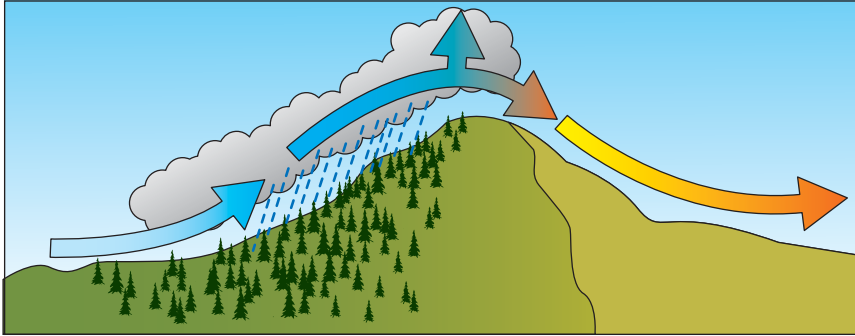


Fig.1-6 - Moist air moving over mountains where it loses its moisture and sinks into a dry subsidence area

Temperature Structure of the Atmosphere

The temperature lapse rate of the atmosphere refers to the change of temperature with a change in height. In the standard case, temperature decreases with height through the troposphere to the tropopause and then becomes relatively constant in the stratosphere.

Two other conditions are possible: an inversion, in which the temperature increases with height, or an isothermal layer, in which the temperature remains constant with height.

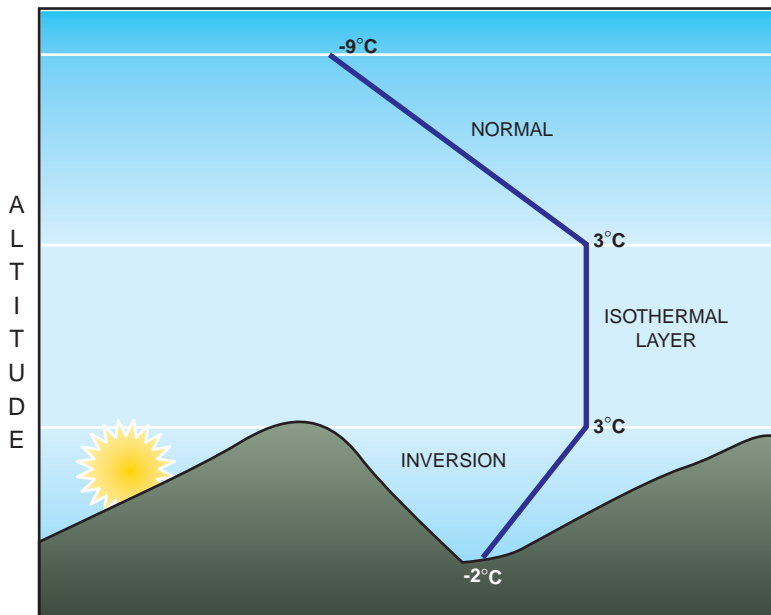


Fig. 1-7 - Different lapse rates of the atmosphere

The temperature lapse rate of the atmosphere is a direct measurement of the stability of the atmosphere.

Stability

It would be impossible to examine weather without taking into account the stability of the air. Stability refers to the ability of a parcel of air to resist vertical motion. If a parcel of air is displaced upwards and then released it is said to be unstable if it continues to ascend (since the parcel is warmer than the surrounding air), stable if it returns to the level from which it originated (since the parcel is cooler than the surrounding air), and neutral if the parcel remains at the level it was released (since the parcel's temperature is that of the surrounding air).

The type of cloud and precipitation produced varies with stability. Unstable air, when lifted, has a tendency to develop convective clouds and showery precipitation. Stable air is inclined to produce deep layer cloud and widespread steady precipitation. Neutral air will produce stable type weather which will change to unstable type weather if the lifting continues.

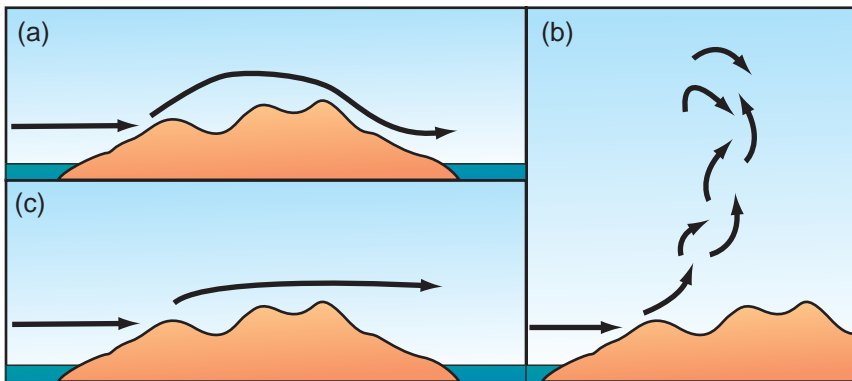


Fig. 1-8 - Stability in the atmosphere - (a) Stable (b) Unstable (c) Neutral

The stability of an air mass has the ability to be changed. One way to destabilize the air is to heat it from below, in much the same manner as you would heat water in a kettle. In the natural environment this can be accomplished when the sun heats the ground which, in turn, heats the air in contact with it, or when cold air moves over a warmer surface such as open water in the fall or winter. The reverse case, cooling the air from below, will stabilize the air. Both processes occur readily.

Consider a typical summer day where the air is destabilized by the sun, resulting in the development of large convective cloud and accompanying showers or thunder-showers during the afternoon and evening. After sunset, the surface cools and the air mass stabilizes slowly, causing the convective activity to die off and the clouds to dissipate.

On any given day there may be several processes acting simultaneously that can either destabilize or stabilize the air mass. To further complicate the issue, these competing effects can occur over areas as large as an entire GFA domain to as small as a football field. To determine which one will dominate remains in the realm of a meteorologist and is beyond the scope of this manual.

Wind

Horizontal differences in temperature result in horizontal differences in pressure. It is these horizontal changes in pressure that cause the wind to blow as the atmosphere attempts to equalize pressure by moving air from an area of high pressure to an area of low pressure. The larger the pressure difference, the stronger the wind and, as a result, the day-to-day wind can range from the gentlest breeze around an inland airfield to storm force winds over the water.

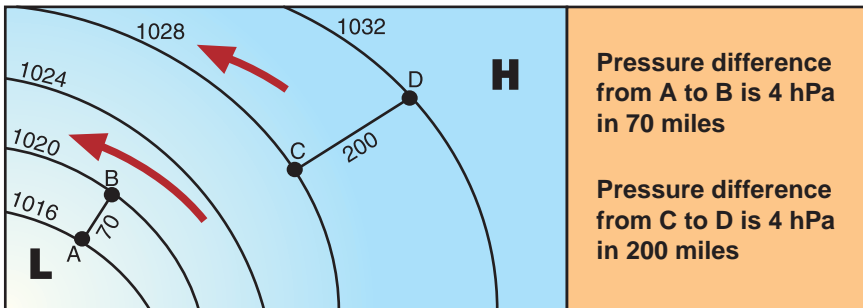


Fig. 1-9 - The greater pressure changes with horizontal difference, the stronger the wind

Wind has both speed and direction, so for aviation purposes several conventions have been adopted. Wind direction is always reported as the direction from which the wind is blowing while wind speed is the average steady state value over a certain length of time. Short-term variations in speed are reported as either gusts or squalls depending on how long they last.

Above the surface, the wind tends to be relatively smooth and changes direction and speed only in response to changes in pressure. At the surface, however, the wind is affected by friction and topography. Friction has a tendency to slow the wind over rough surfaces whereas topography, most commonly, induces localized changes in direction and speed.

Air Masses and Fronts

Air Masses

When a section of the troposphere, hundreds of miles across, remains stationary or moves slowly across an area having fairly uniform temperature and moisture, then the air takes on the characteristics of this surface and becomes known as an air mass. The

area where air masses are created are called "source regions" and are either ice or snow covered polar regions, cold northern oceans, tropical oceans or large desert areas.

Although the moisture and temperature characteristics of an air mass are relatively uniform, the horizontal weather may vary due to different processes acting on it. It is quite possible for one area to be reporting clear skies while another area is reporting widespread thunderstorms.

Fronts

When air masses move out of their source regions they come into contact with other air masses. The transition zone between two different air masses is referred to as a frontal zone, or front. Across this transition zone temperature, moisture content, pressure, and wind can change rapidly over a short distance.

The principal types of fronts are:









<p>Cold Front - The cold air is advancing and undercutting the warm air. The leading edge of the cold air is the cold front.</p>		
<p>Warm front - The cold air is retreating and being replaced by warm air. The trailing edge of the cold air is the warm front.</p>		
<p>Stationary front - The cold air is neither advancing nor retreating. These fronts are frequently referred to quasi-stationary fronts although there usually is some small-scale localized motion occurring.</p>		
<p>Trowal - Trough of warm air aloft.</p>		

Table 1-1

More will be said about frontal weather later in this manual.