Beaufort Wind Scale Encyclopedia Article

Beaufort Wind Scale

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Beaufort Wind Scale

In 1806, to standardize nautical observations, Sir Francis Beaufort, an Irish hydrographer and member of the British Admiralty, created a scale for judging the strength of wind at sea. His scale is still a useful standard for the determination of wind force.

Each of the Beaufort Scale's 12 wind-force levels, ranging from calm to hurricane force, includes a description of the effect of the wind on readily observable, common objects. Thus, the scale gives even an unskilled observer a means of estimating wind force. Originally limited to a description of the effects of wind on a sailing vessel's canvas (force 12, for instance, was "that which no canvas could withstand"), the scale was revised in 1939 by the International Meteorological Committee to include the effect of wind on land features. The numbers from the Beaufort Scale were used on weather maps until 1955, when a system of wind feathers, which show wind direction and intensity, was adopted.