

2016 Holiday Shopping Guide for the Weather Enthusiast

By: Jeff Masters and Bob Henson , 5:26 PM GMT on December 12, 2016

Hunting for that special something for a budding meteorologist or a lifelong weather enthusiast? You can't go wrong with an atmosphere-related gift. Below is the 2016 installment of our traditional holiday shopping guide.

Holiday books for the weather and climate science enthusiast

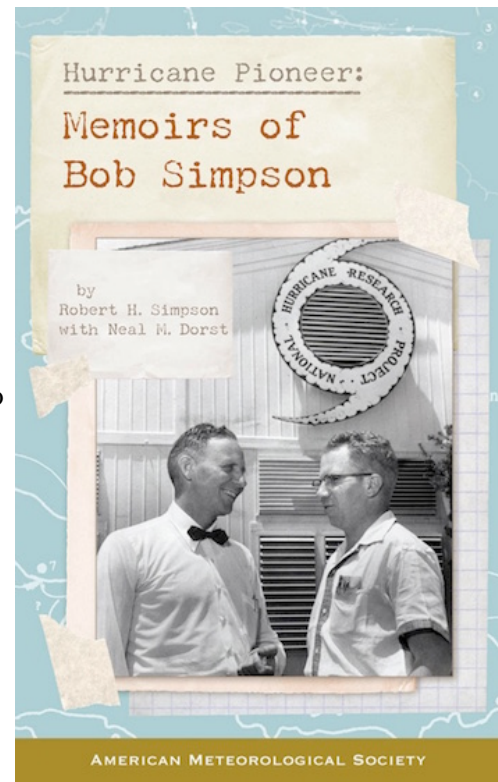
Bob's pick: [“Hurricane Pioneer: Memoirs of Bob Simpson”](#)

Few in the world of atmospheric science have enjoyed a career as varied, illustrious, and extended as the one carved out by Dr. [Robert Simpson](#), who died in late 2014 at the age of 102. We're lucky that Dr. Simpson took the time to document his busy life in detail, as told in “Hurricane Pioneer” (AMS Books, 2015).

It wasn't obvious at first that Bob Simpson would devote much of his professional life to tropical cyclones. In fact, he spent the latter 1930s as a successful high school music and physics teacher in his native Texas, before taking a 67% pay cut to join the U.S. Weather Bureau in Brownsville as a novice observer. World War II opened big doors for Dr. Simpson, as he trained at the legendary University of Chicago Institute of Meteorology, then went on to work in the Miami Weather Bureau office with famed forecaster Grady Norton.

This memoir includes background on Dr. Simpson's forays into early hurricane hunting and “piggyback” research, and on his tenure as the second director of the National Hurricane Center (though with so much to cover, the book seldom lingers on any one event or period). Even as his involvement in tropical meteorology blossomed, Dr. Simpson had a hand in other crucial developments, including a network of Texas radars that served as the prelude for the first national weather-radar network as well as the establishment of the Mauna Loa Observatory, now the world's gold-standard location for tracking the buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Although there's little meteorology in the first third of the book, we do learn how Dr. Simpson's childhood in Corpus Christi, Texas, was shaped by the trauma of a deadly 1919 hurricane. There is plenty of insight on Dr. Simpson's personal and professional relationships, including his 45-year marriage to Dr. Joanne Simpson, an eminent atmospheric scientist in her own right and the first woman to achieve a doctorate in meteorology. Dr. Simpson is candid about the downsides of his globetrotting career path, including an early divorce, and he closes the book with reflections on how his spiritual and scientific paths interrelated. Interestingly, the [Saffir-Simpson](#)



[Hurricane Wind Scale](#)—perhaps his best-known achievement, created with civil engineer Herbert Saffir—gets only two paragraphs, including a self-deprecating comment from Dr. Simpson on the scale’s naming in 1975: “This designation was by committee action, not by our request, and a bit of an embarrassment to me.” Available from the [AMS Bookstore](#) for \$25 (\$20 for members and students), “Hurricane Pioneer” gets five stars for the gentle eloquence of its narrator and for its unique perspective on a 20th-century life in atmospheric science.

<https://www.wunderground.com/blog/JeffMasters/2016-holiday-shopping-guide-for-the-weather-enthusiast>