



A Tornado can be seen crossing over Pinon Mesa at 11:45 a.m. on Aug. 3, 1988. Little damage was reported. Photo from the Kathy Jordan photo collection

Rare Tornado Causes Little Damage, Makes History

By Kathy Jordan

There was already a strong wind blowing in from the southwest early in the evening when the crowds started arriving at the James Bros. circus tent that had been set up at Files Park on 28 Road on May 20, 1970, for the 6 p.m. show. With just 15 minutes and two acts from the end of the show a strong blast of wind snapped the guy ropes along the south edge of the tent, and carried the tent and poles up and across the arena, dumping them behind the grandstand on the north side where most of the children were seated, leaving 80 injured.

According to the Sentinel report there were 800 to 900 people in attendance, mostly children.

Eyewitness told the Sentinel they had hesitated to go inside the tent because they could see that the poles holding up the tent were swaying and several men trying to hold the pole down. Then the public announcer came over the PA system saying "Don't worry, it is perfectly safe."

One of those interviewed by the Sentinel was Robert “Winkelman, a member of the Redlands Lions Club who had sponsored the event. Winkelman said that “shortly after intermission the wind got fierce and then there was a dead calm. All of a sudden there was a whoosh and the big center-poles started to lift.

“It was just like looking at the inside of a balloon. The poles were circling around, with ropes and pulleys hanging onto them – the whole business moved towards us.”

The tent did not collapse on the audience. The injured were struck by the 300-pound main poles that went hurling through at least three of the grandstands or by the whipping ropes that had snapped loose from the stakes.

Some thought it was a tornado; however, the weather bureau never recorded it as such. The winds did reach 50 miles-per-hour.

There was a recorded tornado on Pinon Mesa at 11:45 a.m. on Aug. 3, 1988. Little damage was reported.

The sight of the funnel cloud was visible from the valley floor and generated a great deal of excitement.

It was reported in The Daily Sentinel that Janice Carpenter, owner of the Glade Park store at the time, was kept busy answering the phone fielding questions from Pinon Mesa property owners who were in town and wanted to know what was going on.

It was also reported that Glade Park resident, Tim Menger, spotted the funnel cloud as he was playing catch with his son in their yard. He immediately started the “phone tree”.

This was only the second tornado recorded in the valley. The other one was reported by the weather service near Clifton in 1980, but it didn’t touch down.

Jay Ingelhart , former Public Works Director for City of Fruita, said he had a crew working on putting up fences around Enoch’s Lake that day. Ingelhart was driving up to Pinon Mesa and was at Burford Flats when he saw the twister. When he got up to the lake the crew was eating lunch and he asked them if they had seen the tornado. They said that they had not seen the funnel cloud but that it had got very quiet then suddenly the wind came up and tore the doors off of the outdoor toilets they had recently installed.

Ingelhart said he didn’t think the funnel cloud ever touched down but it did top out a few tree going across the top at the Fruita Reservoir.

Dorothy and Toto should feel safe here.