



# ENFIA Interpreter

May 6, 2026 Vol. 24

## A Message from the President

By Stan Trevena

### Open, open, open!

The May 29th opening day at Carson Pass is quickly approaching. We just had our first ENFIA Docent Training of the season in South Lake Tahoe. We had a strong turnout, with the next training coming on May 13th in Pine Grove. We are testing a different format this year. Instead of speakers with PowerPoints, we are running four tables for different topics, with docents rotating between the tables. The feedback from the first session was very positive from several people who attended. All docents need to complete their training for this year before they will be able to schedule their days volunteering at Carson Pass.

## What's the Forecast?

I had an interesting conversation with someone from the Forest Service yesterday about this season and the changing weather. They just did the latest snow survey at Carson Pass, and it's the lowest snowpack at this date since 1991. That's incredible. I keep an eye on our weather station at Carson Pass, and it's been crazy this season. We would get a bunch of

snow,  
followed  
by rain,  
and then  
periods of  
time  
where we



would not hit freezing temperatures for days, and a few times weeks. This explains the current situation we find ourselves in.

**URL to connect to the weather  
station:**

<https://www.wunderground.com/dash/board/pws/KCAMARKL45>

## May 2, 2026 Carson Pass Snow



As far as the impact of this on this year's flower bloom at Carson Pass, this situation is likely to lead to a much earlier bloom (very likely in June) and a much shorter period of peak blooms. There are already some early bloomers down at lower altitudes this season.

The forecasted weather for the Carson Pass area this summer is even more up in the air. The news media is hyping a potential Super El Niño likely starting in late July. This El Niño is expected to “turbo-charge” summer temperatures, potentially making 2026 and 2027 historically hot. Warm El Niño patterns often bring unsettled tropical moisture into Northern California, increasing the frequency of thunderstorms and lightning strikes in late summer months.

## New This Season

### Interpretive Activities

Mike Conroy (Interpretive Manager) is partnering with Reanna Suela (Conservation Education Specialist with the Forest Service) to bring more interpretive activities to ENFIA.

Back in March Mike had an afternoon historical talk at the Placerville Library on the history of the Carson River Route of the California Trail and how the opening of this route played an important role in the California Gold Rush. Frank Tortorich, a well known Gold Rush Trail historian and published author (and ENFIA member going way back), provided an in-depth presentation about the history of the Mormon Emigrant Trail; how it was built and how that then in turn helped to create the Carson River Route for immigrants coming to the gold fields in California during the Gold Rush days. The room was packed full of people attending.

Future planned events will be posted to the calendar on the ENFIA.org website under the “Discover/Upcoming Events” section. Interpretive events at Carson Pass will likely start in late June. Lectures and other special events will also be announced in an email to ENFIA members.

## **Water @ Carson Pass**

There are two changes for this season related to water. The first is a change imposed by the Forest Service.

Because of changes in regulations for the distribution of water to the public, Carson Pass Information Station will no longer be able to give out water to the public, more specifically our practice of filling PCT hikers bottles with water. To continue this practice, ENFIA would have to be registered with the State as a commercial public distributor of water and fall under strict regulations and testing of the water we give out. We will still be selling water at the Station. We will be allowed to keep water on hand for dogs and the watering of native flowers in the planters out in front of the station.

Barbara Simpson (a docent and former ENFIA board member) and Lynn Price (ENFIA member and docent) have formed the Environmental Stewardship Team. Their first project is changing the water that we sell at Carson Pass Information Station to a more sustainable form. The Forest Service has always requested that we provide access to water at the Station for our visitors. In the past this has taken the form of plastic bottled water for sale to the public for \$1/bottle. This year, after researching the options, we will be moving to aluminum canned water for sale at the same price. This

environmental stewardship team has other things they are working on that will be announced later.

## **Retail Team**

We've brought on two new Retail Associates in the off-season, Janice Selvy and Cailley Gash (both ENFIA members). Both have experience in retail and will be bringing it to the team. The product lines have been divided between Kellie Trevena (Retail Manger) and Janice and Cailley. There will be some new items brought into the station. The wildflower shirt last year was a big hit. A new wildflower shirt will be added this year. The PCT hoodie was a big success last year with both PCT hikers, docents and the public. It's surprising how many people who visit the Station have hiked the PCT at some point in their lives. Several more hiking hoodies from the same company will be added this year that are nature themed.

## **Junior Ranger and Nature Journaling**

Laurel Gromer (ENFIA docent) will be coordinating the Junior Ranger Program again this year at Carson Pass. It was a HUGE success last year. We were expecting this to appeal to younger kids but were surprised to find that even teenagers were participating. We had wanted to offer more on nature journaling last year

but couldn't get the resources pulled together. There are plans to add more nature journaling activities this season.

## See you at the Station!

This is looking to be a very active season up at Carson Pass. We will be opening this year with a lot less snow than in the last three years. If you haven't been up to Carson Pass for a while, this would be a great season to take the drive and go for a hike or sign up for an interpretive activity. Don't forget, your membership with ENFIA gives you a 20% discount on items purchased at the Station (except USFS maps and food items). You need to show your membership card that displays when you log into your membership account to get the discount.

We'll see you up there!

## Get Ready for Summer Thunderstorms

by Lester Lubetkin

We are familiar with California's "Mediterranean" climate, with its wet winters and dry summers. And we're shifting from the Winter and Spring pattern of rain to the hot, dry Summer period. So why is it that when we go into the mountains in Summer, it is so critical to have raingear with us? The answer is the potential for "afternoon thunderstorms". But what are they and how do they form.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) explains that a thunderstorm is a rain shower during which you hear thunder. And since thunder is produced by lightning, all thunderstorms have lightning. Pretty simple.



Cumulonimbus clouds and thunderstorms. Photo: Cloud Appreciation Society

But there is more that we can learn! NOAA tells us that there are three factors needed for thunderstorms to form; (1) moisture, (2) rising unstable air (air that keeps rising when given a nudge), and (3) a lifting mechanism to provide the "nudge". In the summertime, the moisture commonly comes from the North American monsoonal weather pattern, bringing moisture from the Gulf of California into the Sierra Nevada. The lifting mechanism (the "nudge") is the daytime solar heating of the earth's surface, along with topographic lifting due to the mountain slope. And the rising unstable air is the portion of the atmosphere heated by the ground, making it lighter than the surrounding atmosphere.

As the warm air rises, it comes in contact with the cooler surrounding air so that some of the heat is transferred to the surrounding air. This causes the warm air mass to cool

and the moisture it is carrying begins to condense into water droplets. This condensation leads to the formation of clouds. As the air mass continues to rise, it grows upward into areas where the temperature is above freezing. We can often see these thunderstorm clouds, or “thunderheads” developing when viewed from the foothills, but they are hard to see when you are right under them higher in the mountains.

Thunderstorms have three stages in their life cycle: the **Developing Stage**, the **Mature Stage**, and the **Dissipating Stage**.

The **Developing Stage** is recognized by the cumulus clouds that are being pushed upward by the rising column of air. These clouds continue to grow upwards into towering forms, eventually forming what are known as cumulonimbus clouds. As the air continues to move higher, some of the water droplets begin to freeze, setting the conditions for lightning. Different types of ice particles can be created as the air moves into the freezing zone. The ice particles can grow by condensing vapor (like frost) or by collecting smaller liquid drops that haven't frozen yet (a state called "supercooled"). When two ice particles collide, they usually bounce

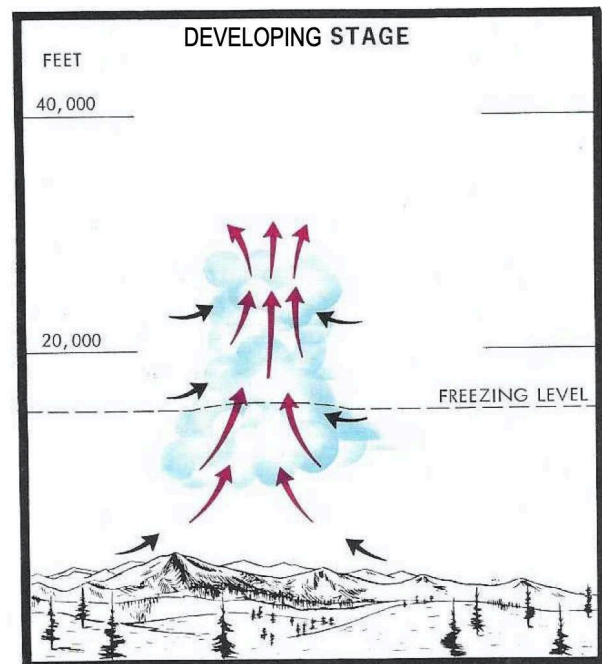


Image: USDA Forest Service

off each other, but one particle can rip off a little bit of ice from the other one and grab some electric charge. The two ice particles that collided now each have a different charge sign - one is positive and one is negative. The different sizes of charged particles means that the smaller and lighter ice particles will be carried upward more so than the larger, heavier particles. This causes the thunderhead cloud to have zones within different concentrations of positive or negative charges. During the Developing Stage, there is little to no precipitation.

The thunderstorm enters the next phase, the **Mature Stage** when the updraft continues to feed the storm, but precipitation begins to fall out of the storm, creating a downdraft (a column of air pushing downward). The Mature Stage is the most likely time for hail, heavy rain, frequent lightning, and strong winds.

In the Developing Stage we see that there is the creation of zones of different electric charge. Early on, the air acts as an insulator between the positive and negative charges in the cloud and between the cloud and the ground. By the time of the Mature Stage, the different zones of positive or negative electric charge are getting pretty strong! When the opposite electric charges build up high enough to overcome the insulating capacity of the air, lightning occurs - the rapid spark of electricity in the atmosphere between clouds, the air, or the ground. The flash of lightning temporarily equalizes the charged regions in the portion of the cloud until the opposite charges build up again. Most lightning is within a cloud or from cloud-to-cloud, but about 1/3 of all lightning discharges run from cloud-to-ground.

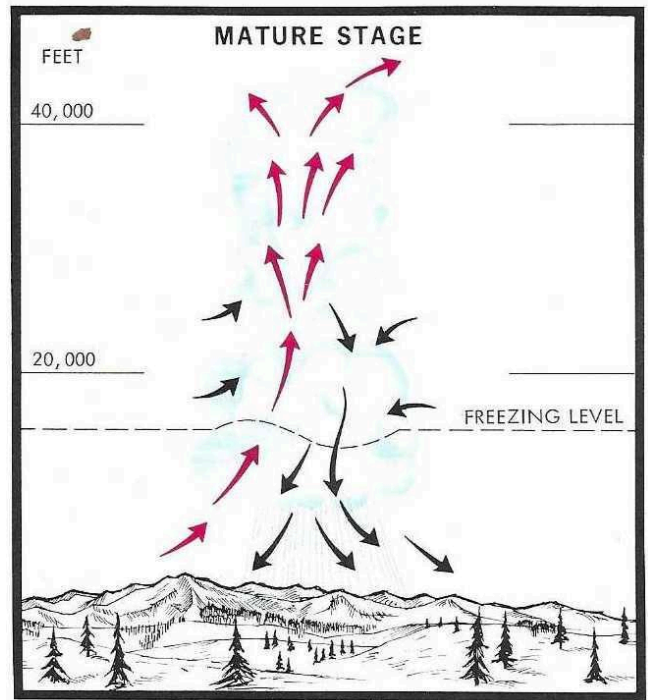
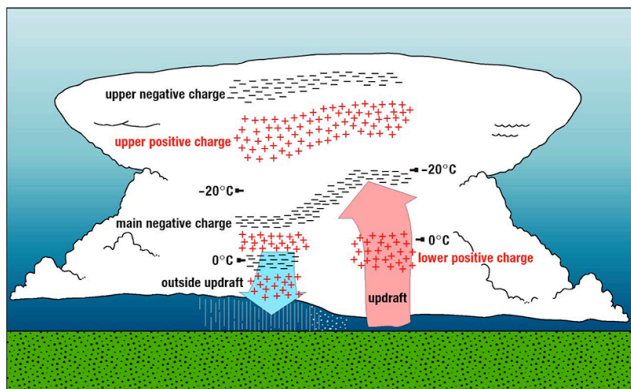


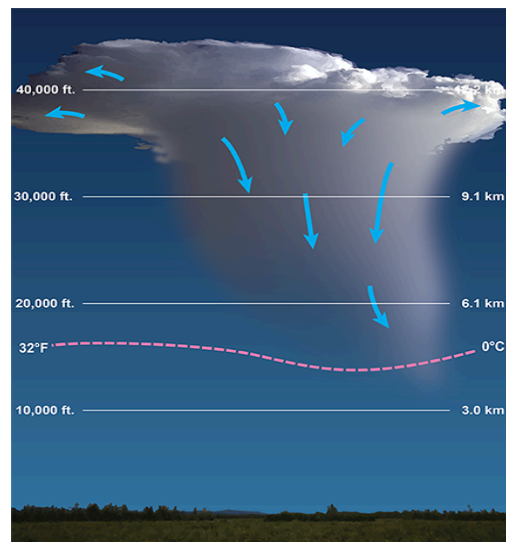
Image: USDA Forest Service

sound does, you can use the lapsed time between seeing the lightning and hearing the thunder to estimate the distance to where the lightning occurred. Just count the number of seconds (one thousand and one, one thousand and two, ...) from the time you see the lightning bolt until you hear the thunder. The distance is about 1 mile for each 5 seconds of elapsed time.



Electric charge in a thunderhead cloud. Image: Nat'l Oceanic and Atmospheric Admin.

The thunder we hear associated with the lighting is because the lightning bolt heats the air briefly to around 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit, much hotter than the surface of the sun. This causes the air to explode outward. Since light travels through the air roughly a million times faster than



Dissipating Stage. Image: National Weather Service

Eventually, a large amount of precipitation is produced and the updraft is overcome by the downdraft, beginning the **Dissipating Stage**. Rainfall decreases in intensity, but lightning remains a danger.

It will soon be time to return to the mountains for Summer activities. Here are some tips for dealing with (and enjoying) the inevitable afternoon thunderstorms (from the Lake Tahoe Community College Wilderness Education program and Yosemite National Park):

#### **Plan ahead:**

- Check forecasts before heading out and be ready to change routes. Sometimes retreating a few miles to lower terrain is the safest move.
- Timing matters – Most lightning strikes happen between 1 PM and 7 PM, so plan summit attempts or ridge traverses for early morning when the air is more stable.
- Watch for afternoon build-up of cumulus clouds. Seek shelter or go to lower elevations if you see towering thunderheads or lightning or hear thunder.

#### **During a Thunderstorm:**

- Seek safe spots. Move away from ridges, exposed peaks, viewpoints, lakes or other water bodies, and isolated trees. Look for low-lying areas, but avoid depressions that could flood. If you are in a forest with no clearing, position yourself under the shortest trees you can find - and don't sit on tree roots.
- Minimize contact – Crouch down on the balls of your feet, keep your

hands off the ground, and avoid touching metal gear. If you're in a group, spread out (at least 50 feet) to prevent multiple injuries from a single strike, allowing for someone to render first aid.

- Stay dry – Lightning is attracted to moisture. Wet clothing, backpacks, or even a damp sleeping pad can increase your risk.
- The only safe place is inside a substantial building or hard-topped vehicle. Stay in a safe location until 30 minutes after the last thunder.

Understanding when storms are likely and how to react can make all the difference between a safe day in the backcountry and a dangerous encounter. Stay aware, stay low, and respect the power of Sierra thunderstorms.

#### References:

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Severe Weather 101, Thunderstorms and Lightning, website:

<https://www.nssl.noaa.gov/education/svrwx101/thunderstorms/>

USDA FOREST SERVICE, 1970, Fire Weather, Agriculture Handbook 360, Chapt. 10 Thunderstorms, pp. 166-179

## **Interested in Hiking in England?**

By Donald Bordenave.  
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Disclaimer: I have not done any hiking in England. A few touristy walks some years ago but that is it.

My brother-in-law, who as it happens, is English, sent me a BBC article about a soon to be completed 2,689 mile “footpath” along the whole coastline of England. Not sure why he sent it to me. I don’t think I ever expressed any interest in long hikes around England. Ten years ago I did spend 30 days doing my own variation of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. Maybe he was thinking I need a new overseas adventure?

Reading the article I noticed the similarity in length between England’s King’s Coast Path ( 2,689 miles) and our Pacific Crest Trail (2,650 miles). This made me wonder if there are ENFIA members out there who would be interested in long trails in England, without of course, the substantial elevations found along the PCT and in the Eldorado National Forest. So I’m sharing the information here.

This is what he sent me: The King’s Coast Trail. BBC article: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy0dxexdd8xo>. (I tried to access the online article a several times and the later attempts got a pop up requiring a subscription)

There are over a dozen (16 actually) National Trails in England, Scotland, and Wales. A great deal of information can be found at the National Trails National Trails website: [https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en\\_GB/trails/](https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/)

The information and map below has been copied from the National Trails website:

[https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en\\_GB/trails/](https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/):

### **Background to the National Trails**

National Trails are long distance walking, cycling and horse riding routes through the best landscapes in England and Wales. In Scotland the equivalent trails are called [Scotland’s Great Trails](#).

There are 16 National Trails. Walkers can enjoy them all, cyclists and horse riders can enjoy the Pennine Bridleway and the South Downs Way, as well as sections of the other Trails.

The King Charles III England Coast Path is the newest (and will be the longest) National Trail when it is complete. Some sections are now open and more will be opening over the coming months. As of March 2024, England and Wales have around 3,600 miles (5,800 Km) of National Trail.



Map of the National Trails as of August 2025