

Dust Bowl Event Cards

There was a lot of static electricity caused by dust storms. To make sure the car engines didn't short out, drivers often dragged chains behind their cars to ground them. You could be knocked from your feet by the static shock when you shook someone's hand.

Many people became superstitious to try to make the rains come. Snakes were killed and laid over fences belly-side up. Dynamite was hoisted into the sky by balloons and ignited to get the atmosphere stirred up to try to force the rain.

If you were as young as ten or even a teen in the 1930s, you might have been a hobo in search of work and adventure. Both boys and some girls were hobos. The President was concerned about children taking to the rails as a way of life.

Dust from the storms was heavy. People learned to sweep it from their roofs, but often forgot to clean it out of their attics. Many attics collapsed because the dust was several feet deep in their attics.

Fourteen dust storms happened in 1932. Thirty-eight happened the next year, 1933. They were called, "black blizzards," and began in 1931 when severe drought hit the Midwestern and southern plains.

The, "Filthy Fifties," began in 1952 when another five year drought started. Other droughts followed in the middle of the 1970s and from 1998-2002.

Tumbleweed is often seen in pictures and movies of the west. Originally from Russia, it is invasive, and needs a lot of water. During the Dust Bowl tumbleweed was used to feed cattle, and some people even tried to eat it.

April 14, 1935, earned the name Black Sunday because it is the day of the worst black blizzard of the Dust Bowl. "...winds in the panhandle reached upwards of 60 MPH, and for at least a brief time, the blackness was so complete that one could not see their own hand in front of their face." <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/oun/?n=events-19350414>

Congress declares soil erosion, "a national menace," and starts a soil conservation program in April of 1935 to help encourage and teach farmers to use practices that will save topsoil and cause less erosion.

It is the fall of 1939 when the rains finally come to end the drought.

On Black Tuesday, enough static electricity was generated in dust clouds to power New York City.

Native plants were also dug up and replaced with plants that had shorter roots that didn't hold onto the soil.

Hungry animals came out of the hills in record numbers. Jackrabbits and grasshoppers became pests. They ate all the plants they could find, leaving little behind for livestock.

People became ill from the dust. It caused respiratory sicknesses, sometimes called, “dust pneumonia,” asthma, and other problems. Many people also suffered from malnutrition.

People began to use the Ogallala Aquifer, which is right beneath the area hardest hit by the Dust Bowl, to get water needed for irrigation. People continue to rely on the aquifer, but it refills slowly.

One storm in May 1934 deposited 12 million tons of dust in Chicago, and dropped layers of fine, brown dust on the streets and parks and rooftops of New York and Washington, DC. Even ships at sea, 300 miles off the Atlantic coast, were coated with dust.

Anywhere from one-third to one-fourth of the population of the plains moved west, many to California. Even though they weren’t all from Oklahoma they were called, “Okies,” and not welcomed.

Black Sunday was reported to have picked up and carried twice as much dirt as was dug out of the Panama Canal when it was made. The Panama Canal took seven years to make. The black blizzard known as Black Sunday took one afternoon.

Before being hit by the Dust Storms, the area known as the Dust Bowl had fertile soil. This area is made up of western Kansas, eastern Colorado and New Mexico, and the panhandle regions of Texas and Oklahoma

Who named the area affected by drought and erosion the Dust Bowl? A reporter named Robert E. Geiger, who had been caught in the Black Sunday storm, is credited with first using the phrase Dust Bowl. His words, “Residents of the southwestern dust bowl marked up another black duster today...,” appeared in an article the next day. <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/oun/?n=events-19350414>