Chase Day: May 29, 2004

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Monday, 31 May 2004
Last Updated Saturday, 23 August 2008

We saw this potential outbreak coming over three days in advance. Kyle came to Tulsa from Kansas City, so we could chase together. This storm was marking a major pattern shift. Most of the severe weather was occurring in the Northern Plains. Now, it was shifting to the Southern Plains.

I was pretty sure SPC would issue a High Risk, especially since it was Memorial Day Weekend. It looked like it was be a very busy day with some action. I wasn't disappointed. Oh yeah, my tornado-less streak is now over.

Target: Pratt, KS

SPC Event Log

Photos from the Chase

Videos from the Chase

Chase Partners:

Kyle Mozley

Location:

SW, Central Kansas, and E Oklahoma

Miles Travelled:

700

Total Time:

16 Hours

11:00am (1600 UTC)

Kyle and I left my house in Glenpool, OK, bound for Pratt, KS. We headed north on US-75 to US-412 westbound. We stopped at Tonkawa, OK, at a Love's Travelstop. I bought a 24-hr account with Truckstop.net. After finally getting the connection to work, Kyle and I looked over data for about 20 minutes before deciding our target area still looked prime.

We continued north on I-35/Kansas Turnpike until we got to Wichita. A PDS Tornado Watch was issued for Kansas and Oklahoma. We learned that Aaron Kennedy was in the area positioning himself in Hutchinson, KS. We stopped in Newton, KS, we lunch and a data check. Here we met up with chasers Blake Naftel, Melissa Moon, and Tony Laubach. After looking at some more data and killing about 2 hours, we decided to head south of Hutchinson to set up shop.

3:00pm (2000 UTC)

Storms began to form south of Pratt, KS, all the way into SW OK. These would eventually include one supercell (Storm-B below) that formed one county east of the OK/TX border and tracks all the way to Delaware County, OK (OK/AR border). We headed east out of Newton, KS, on US-50, we decided to try for some storms developing to our SW. Fortunately for us, storm motion was primarily E-ENE at 20-30mph, and Kansas has a wonderful road network...especially dirt roads. We dropped south on US-61 from Hutchinson, then south on KS-14.

There are three storms that we could intercept.
We tried to go after the northern storm because it was closest. During the intercept, the middle storm died leaving us with two storms. We hoped this would isolate them and cause som e strengthening. However, the northern storm's inflow was seeded and became choked off the storm to the south, which was quickly becoming the dominant supercell (Storm-A). We abandoned this storm and proceeded to intercep Storm-A.

We hurried south on KS-14 through Kingman south to US-160, then east to Milan. Tony broke off of us at somepoint and opted to take another route that would put him closer to the storm sooner. Blake and Melissa were riding together and opted to go with us and swing out east of the storm, which would put us much further away, but with plenty of time to let the storm come to us.

7:30pm (0030 UTC)

We dropped south on Milan Rd. and shortly after, we spotted a tornado (Tornado-1A; this notation means tornado #1 from Storm-A) on the ground about 10 miles west of us. Holy cow!! Finally, after 3+ years of chasing, I finally bag my first tornado. We continued to follow it as we drove south towards KS-44. We turned west on KS-44, and the tornado was still on the ground (3.1 MB).

We continued west on KS-44, which eventually ended in road construction. Tornado-1A began to rope. From our point of view, the tornado weakened, remained in contact with the ground, then gained some strength and definition. We turned north onto S. Argonia Rd. Next, we turned west on W 60th ST. for one-half mile. This placed us about 4 miles east of Freeport, or about 6 miles south of Argonia, KS.

7:42pm (0042 UTC)

We continued to watch Tornado-1A about 6 miles to our NW. It continued to move AWAY from us. The tornado was actually rotating around the mesocyclone itself. About four minutes later, a new tornado developed due west of our position (Tornado-2A). I captured it on tape as it formed and evolved (6.4 MB). We decided to try and get closer to get a better view of the tornado. So, we packed up and headed north ne miles on Argonia Rd. to S 50th St. We moved 1-2 miles west and set up shop. We hoped to let the tornado pass about 1 miles to our NW. However, if it should turn right, we stopped at the intersection of a road that went four miles straight south. So, we had a quick exit route. This entire time, Tornado-2A continued to stay on the ground.

8:00pm (0100 UTC)

We also had two tornadoes on the ground at one point as we moved (3.9 MB). However, I was unable to capture this on tape since I was driving (Tornado-3A). Tornado-3A dissipated only to have another one touchdown (Tornado-4A) just north of the main tornado. At one point, there were actually THREE tornadoes on the ground. They were

all separate and well-distanced from each other extending from different points around the mesocyclone and rotating around it (6.5 MB). I was not able to get this on video. This included Tornado-4A and Tornado-5A.

The storm structure on this beast was incredible. I've never seen anything like it. Well-defined beaver tails and perfect mammatus. You could easily see the updrafts twisting up through the mid- and upper-levels (4.4 MB). Large amounts of dust began to be sucked up into the updraft. Dust was also being kicked up by the RFD to the southwest. At times, the condensation funnel became very this and we lost sign of it completely. We questioned whether the tonrado was still on the ground. However, under close observation, we found debris still swirling along the ground, although it was heavily obscured by dust and debris. Soon, Tornado-2A grew and strengthen into the strongest tornado we had seen yet (3.9 MB). A half-mile wide wedge evolved and right-turned directly at us. We decided to pick up and move back east to the intersection with Argonia Rd., so we could take a quick drive south if need be (5.5 MB). However, just as we moved the tornado turned back to the NE missing us by 1-2 miles and treating us with an incredible view.

As we continued to watch the storm and gather great video and stills, the tornado became heavily obscured by dust and debris. Eventually, we lost sight of it, however, we could still make out the circulation on the ground. We pakced up and headed back to the north and east, so we could get a better visual on the tornado. We dropped south on Argonia Rd., back to KS-44, then east to KS-49.

8:44pm (0144 UTC)

We turned north on KS-49 and headed for Conway Springs, KS (2.9 MB). We came to the realization that this storm was on a direct path for the Wichita area, and this storm was showing no signs of weakening anytime soon. At least, it was moving slow enough to provide lots of warning time. We finally gained some ground on the storm and still found a half-mile wide wedge on the ground very near Conway Springs, KS. This tornado has been rated F3 by NWS-Wichita.

9:03pm (0203 UTC)

As Tornado-2A moved into the Conway Springs area, our northward route (KS-49) was cut off. So, we headed east on US-160 hoping to again get close and intercept the storm north of Wellington, KS. However, we began to lose light quickly at this point and the video did not turn out well. We stopped as the tornadic area was due north of our position by about 4 miles (9 E Wellington). We could not

see the ground due to the trees, so we were unsure if the tornado was continuously on the ground. If it was, then it had evolved to a multiple vortex nature. However, we believe that we were seeing separate touchdowns as the condensation funnels appeared. I believe we counted twomore possible touchdowns (Tornado-6A and Tornado-7A). We also meausred inflow winds at 47.8mph 9 miles east of Wellington.

We followed the storm north as it passed north of Wellington. Turning onto US-81, we spotted another tornado on the ground as it was back-lit by lightning (Tornado-8A). We stopped one mile south of KS-55 and watched the storm try to cycle and produce another tornado south of Wichita. We let the storm pass and talked with Blake and Melissa for a while. Then, we broke off us the chase. Blake and Melissa headed into Wichita to evaluate their video and east, while Kyle and I headed home thinking we were done for the night....

10:45pm (0345 UTC)

We crossed the border back into Oklahoma and noticed a monster supercell to the south being lit up by lightning. We could see a back-sheared anvil and knew someplace close to home was getting creamed. We stopped at the Love's in Tonkawa again for gas and dinner at Subway. We saw a report from KWTV in OKC of a monster supercell east of Stroud, OK, heading for the Tulsa area. This is Storm-B that we briefly mentioned early. We hooked up to the Wi-Fi signal and checked out some data. The radar picture was incredible. It was a textbook example of classic, cyclic supercell. The BWER produced an almost completye donut-hole as well as a clear flanking line. This storm was on a direct path for Glenpool. We flew east on US-412/Cimarron Turnpike watching the lightning every step of the way.

12:15am (0515 UTC)

We came into the west side of Tulsa on US-412. Unfortunately, the core cut us of, and were were not able to get east of the storm quickly enough. We planned to speed east to US-69 and drop south to Wagoner to be SE and ahead of the storm. We were forced to drive slowly through Tulsa to stay out of the core and the wrap-around area as the tornadic areas passed through south Tulsa (no damage was found in Tulsa County). As we approached Downtown Tulsa, we saw two distinct power flashes occur downstream along the Arkansas River, most likely due to the RFD winds. Since it was night, I wasn't able to get any usable video or pictures. We stopped in the Catoosa area as the storm approached US-412 near Inola. We decided to let it pass, so we could have a chance of a visual. We cautiously moved east on US-412 keeping a distance of about 2-4 miles from the storm. Just as we passed the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System, we spooted a well-defined lowering and a funnel.

2:15am (0710 UTC)

We continued to follow the storm east on US-412.
We stooped that the Chouteau Bend Access Area on Ft. Gibson Lake (where the Cherokee Turnpike and US-412 split heading east) about 4 miles from Locust Grove. A tornado had touched down somewhere near Maize and Murphy producing damage. We debated heading east on US-412 or the Cherokee Turnpike. The terrain becomes very hily with bad spotting areas. While I was on the phone with KOTv, we spotted a wall cloud and funnel cloud followed about one minute later by 4-6 power flahses 5 miles east of us. Upon further analysis, the power flashes were most likely due to the RFD. We drove through Locust Gove later looking for damage, but found none. Power was still on in town, too. We followed Storm-B east on the Cherokee Turnpike into Delaware County. The storm began to quickly weaken as it approached the Arkansas border. We broke off the chase and headed home at about 2:50am.

5:00am (1000 UTC)

After dropping off video at KOTV, we finally arrived back home in Glenpool. We sustained no damage even thankfully.

SUMMARY:

Wow! What a day! After 3+ years, the my tornado-less streak (at least confirmed tornadoes) has ended. I have to thank Kyle for coming down and chasing with me, if was fun. If he hadn't have come down from Kansas City, I probably would not have chased in Kansas that day. Instead, I would have chased the long-track beast in Oklahoma, or more likely, I would have been working in-studio all ngith, which still would have been good because it would have provided some big-time experience for me.

As of the writing of this summary,
NWS-Wichita has concluded that the tornadoes in south-central Kansas reached a maximum of F3 in the vicinity of Argonia and Conway Springs. Many homes were destroyed, and there were some injuries. We beliveve we saw 8 seaparate touchdowns from Storm-A. NWS-ICT was able to find 9 separate damage paths during their survey.

NWS-Tulsa found F3 damage in Creek
County and F1 damage 5.8 miles SW of Locust Grove. During the time Storm-B was in NWS-TSA's CWA, they found 6 damage paths. Storm-B also produced tornadoes back in the OKC area near Calumet, including an anti-cyclonic tornado.

Easily, this has been the best chase of my career, thus far.

Final tornado count for the day: 9

SPC Event Log

Photos from the Chase

Videos from the Chase