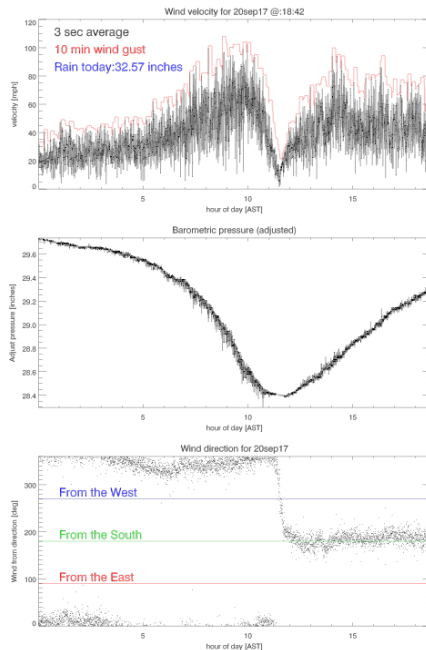


The Passage of Hurricane MARIA over Arecibo Observatory Gerrit Verschuur

A brief (annotated) report begun Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2017; 6pm.

This time we did not dodge a bullet (we dodged a bullet with IRMA). We were hit right in the eye by Hurricane MARIA. (Pun intended.)



Weather data at Arecibo Observatory, my location during the storm.

We have no phone service or internet at the observatory where I and 8 others (as well 2 kids, 3 dogs, 2 rabbits), plus two security guards, have all survived unscathed. But I dread to imagine what has happened in the rest of the island. I had a room to myself with a shower, a fridge, and of course electricity on the site since the auxiliary generators kept running.

The wind is still gusting to 60 mph, which I know because one of our colleagues, Phil the local genius, downloaded the output of a wind gauge and barometer to a computer file which we could access for our computers (shown above) on an internal network. The main anemometer was destroyed by probably a 120 mph wind gust this morning but data from a more robust one was later downloaded.

Today it rained 32 inches. The wind maximum gusts were about 107 mph with the one at about 120 mph not recorded! It is now 6 ½ hours since the minimum pressure and it is no longer raining but some healthy gusts still come through. The

wind is now from the south whereas this morning it was from the north. That was the eye that was.

Joan plus other family members are probably very worried because as yet we have no communication.

Now to the local damage: Trees have been stripped of their leaves. Many trees are down. Lamp posts on site have collapsed and worst of all one of the antennas, the 430 MHz line feed for those who know what that is, broke off into two pieces that hung suspended up there until the south wind knocked them down completely. Tomorrow we will find out what damage they did to the dish itself. (Created about 20 holes in the surface.)

Most of our offices are fine, but who knows what will happen for the rest of the night.

I think we are going to be marooned here for a week at least. (Optimist - it is now 12 days.) The roads up here will be impassable. (They have been largely cleared by Oct 1.0

I estimate that the center of the eye passed over the town of Arecibo itself. (It did! The anemometer there blew out at 150 mph we later learned. And in Vieques, an island to the east of PR recorded 190mph when its wind gauge broke. We learned this a few days after I started this report.)

Our Mercedes convertible is safe but I expect that my Toyota Yaris, still at the apartment, has blown into the sea. I also expect that the floods will have washed away a key bridge road between our apartment and the main highway. So it will be some time before we can drive that road. The only detour of but 20 miles is probably also washed out. (I heard a few days later that the entire area where our apartment is located was under water but the apartment is on a rise.)

Thursday we wake up to a thunderstorm. So far since Tuesday it has rained 38.43 inches. By the end of the day 39.26 inches – 1 meter – in 2 days.

Friday evening. There is very heavy flooding on the island. No phone, no internet power out over much of the island. No cellphones except in and near San Juan.

Trees and power lines down everywhere. Dams are breaking and forcing more evacuations. This we hear on a portable radio and from family because we now have a satellite phone for calling the USA.

One week later, Sept 27. Our apartment is fine. The little bridge as not washed away. Car was there and started. But the road from the observatory to the beach where we live is heartbreaking. The devastation is horrific. We estimate that the

most windy side of the eye went over the Arecibo area and official reports say gusts of 160 mph were common.

Joan is still stuck in Maryland and may return this Sunday. The San Juan airport is a mess and one of the terminals (Jet Blue) was blown away.

There is no water or electricity in much of the island, our apartment area included.

Cheers

Gerrit