Storm Chasing Class

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Forty-four thousand miles. That’s how far WKU’s Storm Chasers have travelled since 2010 when meteorology students began tracking storms across the Great Plains every spring.

Amy Bingham has more on this hands-on opportunity in this week’s View from the Hill.

“For us going out into the field, forecasting, going to actual activity and seeing the storm, that’s our lab. That’s how we learn.”

Every spring, eight students get to put their meteorology skills to the test.

“It’s challenging because its put on you for the day. You make the forecast, you give the discussion but you worry about am I going to agree with everyone else on what’s going to happen.”

A course called Field Methods in Weather Analysis and Forecasting includes a storm chasing trip across the central US.

Every day for two weeks, students wake up and study data to determine the best location for weather activity.

“In this class there’s very little room for error. If a student feels strongly we need to be in a part of the nation by four o’clock and that’s a wrong decision, then we sit out in the sun all day and don’t get much out of that.”

They spotted this EF2 in Canadian Texas midway through the trip.

“We were a safe distance away so we could hear birds chirping, there was a light breeze, the sun was out. I wouldn’t say it was pleasant but nothing too terrifying.”

Not at all like the tornado Tori Hampton survived in Metcalfe county when she was just five years old.

“We got in the basement and everyone was huddled in the corner and that’s when I heard the sound of a train (everyone says you hear a train and it really does with wind, glass breaking, metal screeching). It was crazy.”

It’s a memory that sparked a career in meteorology, one she says she’s much more prepared for since this trip.

“It increased by forecasting ability, I didn’t know too much about radar before this trip, I had learned in class, but being able to see in real life, that’s the best experience there is.”

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

More than a half dozen businesses donated money toward the student fees for the trip.

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