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Tornado

Continued from page 7A

He said there were at least 35 twisters over the weekend.

Many were supercells, powerful storms in which the whole cloud mass rotates, wrapping the storm in rain.

It is not that giant rotation that forms the tornado, Brooks said. "You don't directly take that rotation 10,000 feet above the ground and somehow move that down to the ground.'

But the rotating cloud mass helps create a favorable environment for a tornado to form, he said, offering a low cloud base and strong wind shear.

Wind shear means that winds are blowing in one direction at one level and another direction above, causing the air in between to rotate.

Warm and moist air is lighter than air that is cold and dry, so the lighter stuff tends to rise upward. As the rising air cools, the moisture begins to condense, producing clouds and rain.

When the warm, moist air rising from below reaches that spinning area in the wind shear

it tilts the rotation and the funnel cloud forms.

Getting a better understanding of how that rotation reaches down to the ground is a major focus of research, Brooks added.

When it does reach the ground, forces in the twister become unbalanced and air is drawn in at the base of the tornado.

If conditions are just right, winds speed up as they near the center of the tornado, like a figure skater spins faster when she pulls her hands in close to her body.

While tornadoes occurred in every state, they are most common in the center of the country, especially in Tornado Alley, a band running north from Texas through Oklahoma and Kansas.

In most cases the formation process is the same.

"If you get a good environment to make a tornado, the atmosphere doesn't care where it is. It's just more common to get those environments out here," Brooks said in a telephone interview from his Oklahoma office.

Mars' climate varies north to sout

(AP) — The north and south poles on Mars look very different from each other, and scientists now think they know why: Circulation patterns in the red planet's very thin atmosphere tend to keep all the water in the north, leaving the south pole high and dry.

Mars exploration by unmanned spacecraft has shown the northern hemisphere has a large polar cap made up mostly of frozen water, while the southern hemisphere has a much smaller cap made up almost entirely of frozen carbon dioxide, or dry ice.

A new computer model suggests the apparently permanent difference results partly from the much higher elevation in the south — which is an average of three miles higher than the north.

Mark Richardson of the California Institute of Technology and John Wilson of the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory at Princeton University reported in a recent issue of the journal Nature that the difference in elevation shifts the Hadley effect, an atmospheric circulation pattern created when heated air rises from the warmer equator and sinks toward the poles.

"It's the dominant form of atmospheric circulation in the tropics here on Earth," Richardson said, "where you get rising air

in the region most strongly heated by the sun that has to be replaced by cooler air at the surface

On Earth, however, the circulation is balanced between the northern and southern tropics, causing the gentle trade winds across the relatively flat and even expanse

On Mars, the Hadley effect reaches

I think it is an important step in understanding how climate change on Mars might be occurring.

> - David Hinson Stanford University

much farther toward the poles across a dry and dusty surface

The huge difference in elevation between the north and south poles also tends to push the thin Martian air more strongly from the high elevations of the toward the northern lowlands, Richardson said.

The resulting imbalance dumps snow

and ice at the north pole of Mars. may be responsible for its alternate

of ice and dust, he said. "On Earth, we're used to thin southern summer is similar to the summer," Richardson said, "but its

way on Mars. Mars is tilted on its axis at a same degree as Earth, causing act

seasons as it orbits the sun. Unlike Earth, however, Mars has variation in orbit that puts it about cent closer to the sun when it is sur the south, making the season much intense than summer in the norther

David Hinson of Stanford Unive one of the leaders of the latest NASA vey of Mars, said Martian weather the focus of several unmanned spar sions planned in the coming decade.

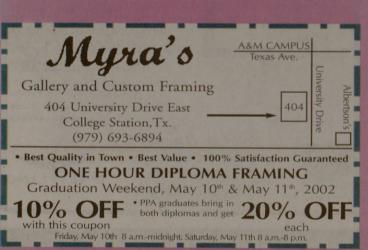
He said the model develor Richardson and Wilson makes useful parisons between actual measur taken by the Mars Global Surveyors craft now orbiting the planet ando

"It seems quite plausible to me," said. "I think it is an important understanding how climate change might be occurring.

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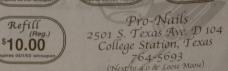
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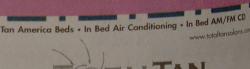
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