

Tropical Cyclone *Connie* February 1959

This tropical cyclone is forever known as *Connie*. The Bureau didn't name cyclones in those days but it picked up its name from somewhere and it stuck. It crossed the coast at Guthalungra where mean sea level pressure in the eye was recorded at 948 hPa. Severe wind damage occurred at Ayr, Home Hill and Bowen. A man was killed at Ayr when a shop fell on him. At Ayr 33% of homes were severely damaged. The Buffalo Hall was wrecked, schools and hotels were unroofed. The damage bill to buildings in Ayr was more than 200,000 Australian 1959 pounds.

At Home Hill 100 persons were left homeless and no buildings escaped damage with every window broken in the main shopping area. 700 windmills were destroyed in the Ayr Home Hill area.

The anemometer at Bowen recorded wind gusts up to 100 knots over a 2 hour period with forty homes totally destroyed, 190 badly damaged and 300 partly wrecked. There was severe damage to the Powerhouse, Salt works, coke works and railways - dozens of boats were swamped. The damage bill to buildings in Bowen was more than 600,000 Australian 1959 pounds.

Wind also caused considerable damage at Proserpine with 50 houses and the Hospital badly damaged. There was even damage at Rockhampton as the cyclone moved south. Flood waters at Mackay caused evacuations and damage - Floods swept away the Mirani railway bridge and under-mined the Forgan Bridge.

Clermont experienced the worst floods since the 1916 cyclone. In Southern Queensland, Laidley had its worst flood on record with 50 shops under 8 feet of water - 200 families were evacuated and 50 people were rescued from the roof tops. Killarney also had a record flood with 2 bridges swept away.

In Allora people were evacuated from their homes.

On the 18th Brisbane had wind gusts to 48 knots with minor damage and power lines down. Floods extended down to NE NSW where a man was killed by fallen power lines.

Figure 1 shows the analyses up to landfall. It passed to the south of Willis Island and then to the east of Townsville. It then moved down into the Ayr Bowen area where a more detailed analysis is shown in the right hand frame. In Figure 2 a detailed track of the cyclone is drawn together with the approximate size of the radius of maximum winds. The eye as viewed from Townsville radar had a north to south dimension of 40km and an east west dimension of 16km. Townsville radar has an obstructed view of this area as Mount Elliot lies in its path so the eye image would be distorted so a radius of maximum winds of 20km was used. The anemometer at Bowen Airport (Figure 3) shows gusts near 110mph (96knots) from 0245UTC to 0500UTC 16 February 1959. From Figure 2 there is a good chance the radius of maximum winds did not reach the Bowen anemometer between 0245UTC and 0500UTC and after 0500UTC when the cyclone came closer to Bowen the winds around the eye would be weakening.

Connie also had a large impact in Southern Queensland and New South Wales and its movement down to New South Wales is shown in Figure 4.

Floods

Floods in the wake of the February cyclone caused widespread dislocation of road, rail and air traffic over a great part of the Central Coast, Highlands, South Coast and Darling Downs districts, mainly from 17th and 20th. Many bridges were washed away, stock were lost in some of the rapid headwaters flooding, and in a few instances towns were severely damaged. Moderate flooding affected the lower **Burdekin River** on 17th and 18th but in the **Pioneer River** basin sharp flooding caused the evacuation of 200 people from Mackay and the loss of bridges at Finch Hatton and Mirani, with a peak at Mirani on 17th.

The whole of the **Fitzroy** catchment experienced moderate flooding which commenced on 17th and moved to the lower reaches by the end of the month. Peaks on the **Mackenzie River** were St. Aubins on 18th and Royles on 21st. Peaks on the **Dawson River** were at Taroom on 19th and Theodore on 24th. Peaks on the **Fitzroy River** were at Riverslea on 24th and Rockhampton on 27th. A new bridge was swept away on the Duaringa - Springsure highway at **Mimosa Creek**. Two hundred sheep were lost in the severe flood on **Capella Creek**, and many Clermont families were evacuated when **Sandy Creek** became a 500 metre wide torrent after 275mm of rain within 12 hours in the surrounding area. Clermont was isolated in flooding which was described as the worst since the 1916 disaster. In the lower **Fitzroy River**, water entered low lying yards in parts of Rockhampton at the peak of the flood.

Only slight flooding was reported in the **Kolan**, **Burnett** and **Mary** rivers, but following 150 to 250mm rains, severe floods affected the headwaters region of the **Condamine River** and south western parts of the **Brisbane** catchment. Laidley experienced the worst flood in its history on 18th, when **Laidley Creek** was 2 kilometres wide and approximately 0.4 metres higher than the 1893 flood. Very rapid flooding inundated the main business centre and 50 shops had up to 2.5 metres of water in them, resulting in high cost damage to shop fittings and machinery. Only a few houses in the town were above the flood, more than 200 families were evacuated and 50 people rescued from roof tops.

Following 235mm at the Head, [mostly overnight rain], the **Condamine River** reached a width of 3 kilometres at Killarney. Water reached a height of 3 metres in the business section of the town, the highest in memory. Two bridges were swept away and the total damage cost in the town was very high. Allora reported its biggest flood for 50 years, bridges were damaged, people evacuated from homes and kilometres of fencing washed away. The flood crest flattened as it moved down the Condamine and **Balonne** rivers, giving mostly moderate flooding. Peaks reported were Warwick on 18th, Tummaville on 20th, Ranges Bridge on 20th, St. George on 24th and Dirranbandi on 27th.

Slight flooding with little damage was reported in the **Macintyre**, **Moonie**, **Maranoa** and **Warrego** rivers at this time. At the end of the month 350 to 450mm rains in 24 hours caused much local flooding in the far north coast with considerable traffic disabilities between Townsville and Cairns.

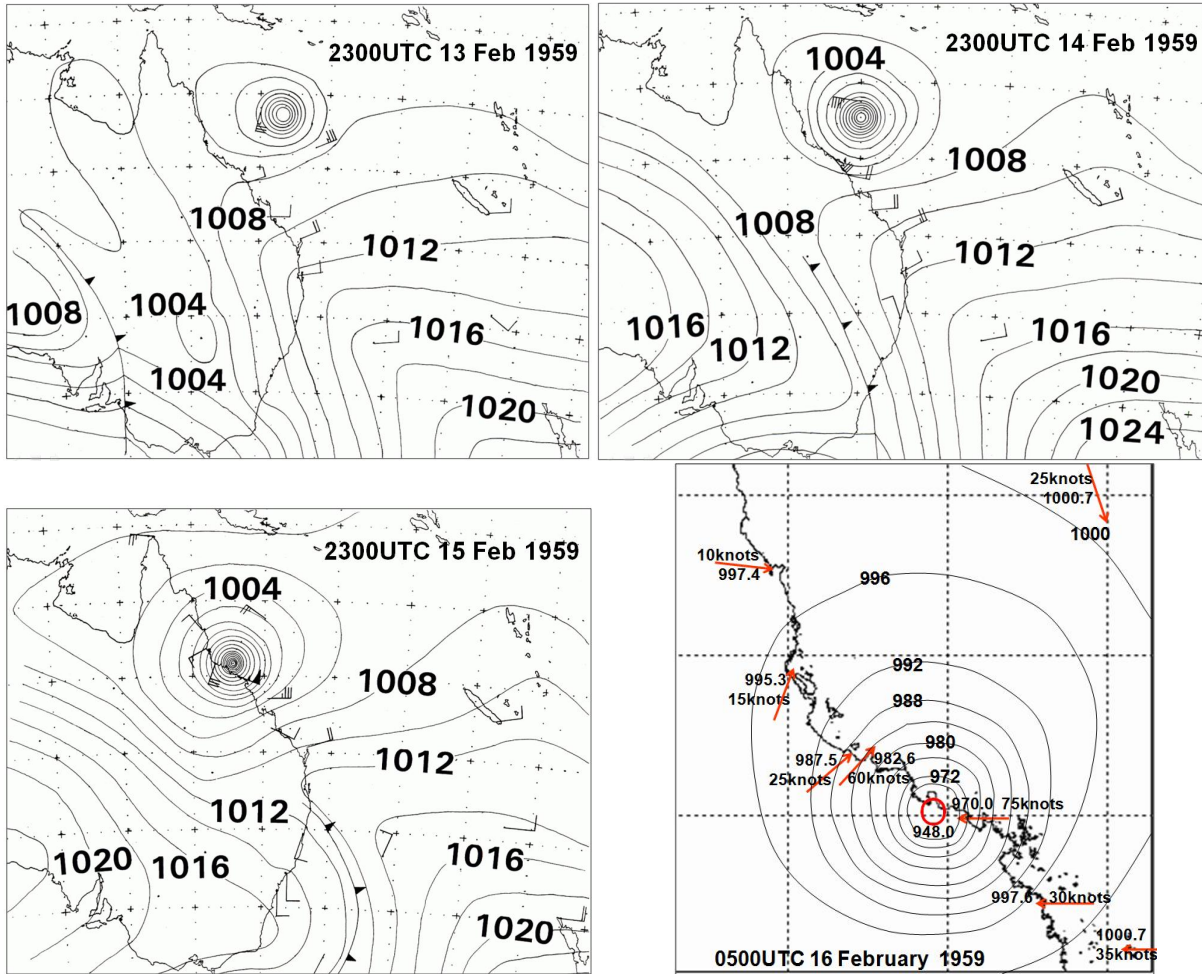


Figure 1. Mean sea level analyses of *Connie* leading up to landfall and a close up at landfall (lower right frame) where the isobars are drawn every 4hPa down to 968hPa. The red circle denotes calm conditions in the eye at Guthalungra where a mean sea level pressure of 948hPa was read.

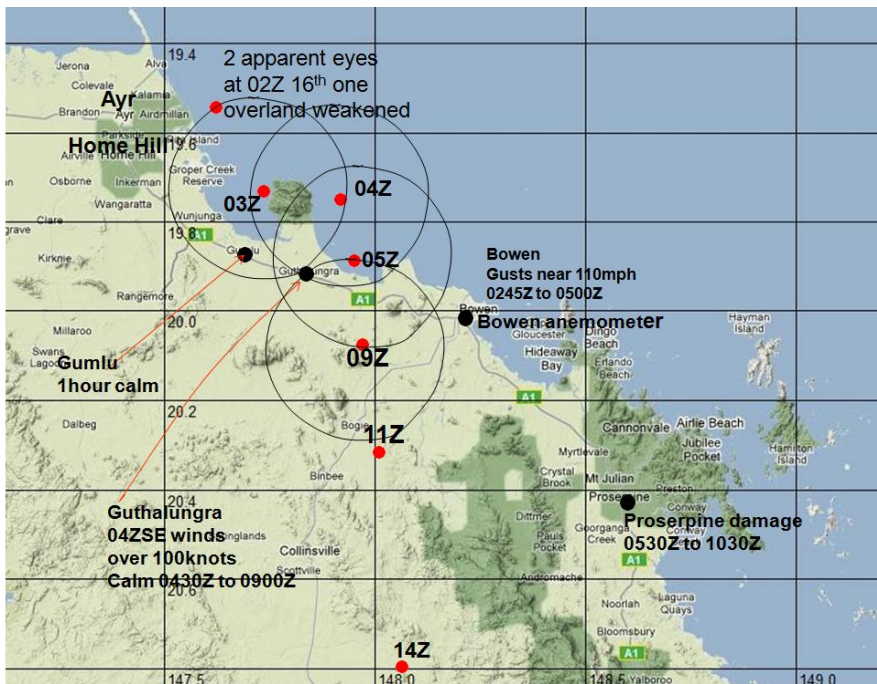


Figure 2. Track of *Connie* threading its way through Ayr, Home Hill and Bowen with the black circle showing the approximate dimensions of the radius of maximum winds.

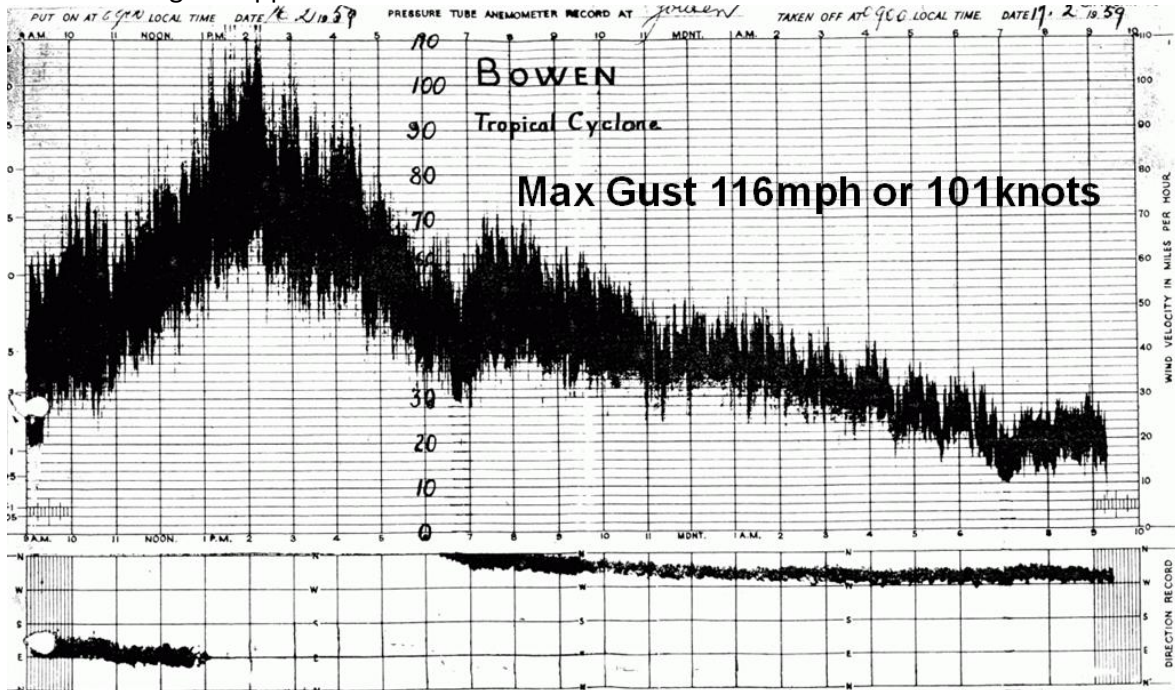


Figure 3. Anemometer chart from Bowen Airport during the passage of tropical cyclone *Connie*.

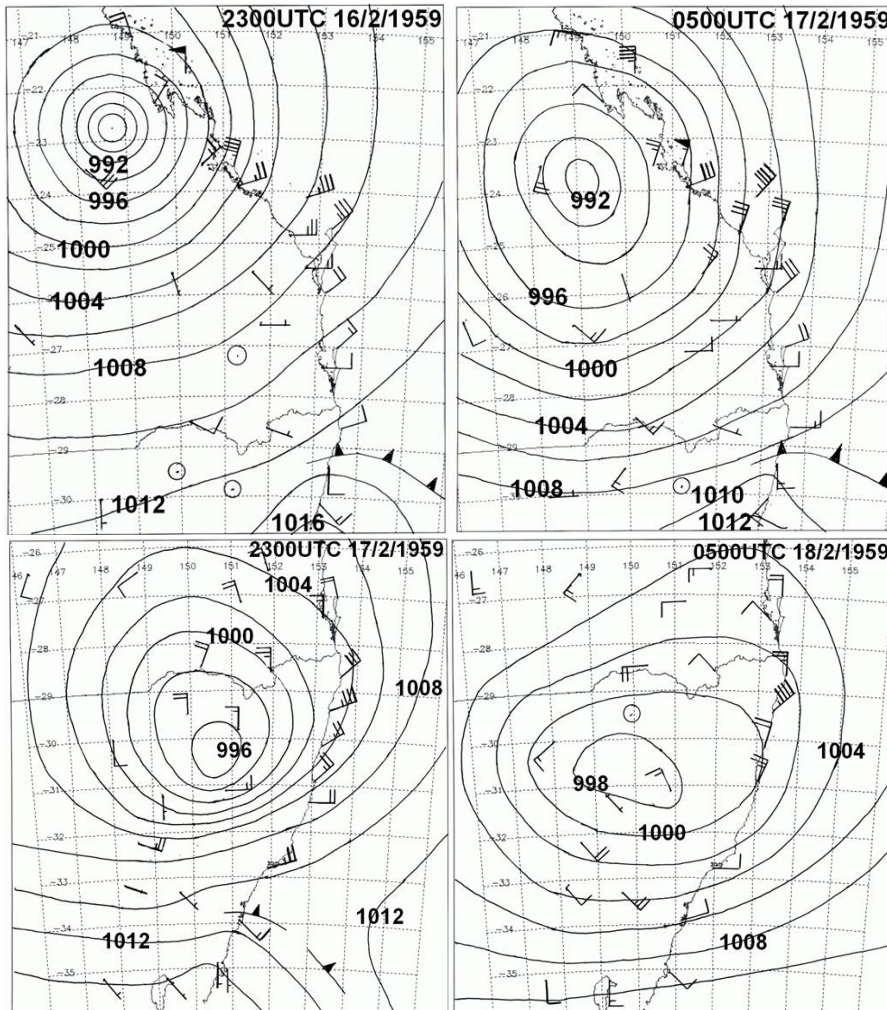


Figure 4. Mean sea level sequence of tropical cyclone *Connie* tracking southwards into New South Wales.