

HORSE LATITUDES

(Reproduced from *De Zee*, Den Helder, N° 8, August 1939, p. 398.)

The Editor of an international dictionary made a request to the Netherlands Royal Meteorological Institute for a definition of the term "Horse Latitudes". Here is the reply:

The "Meteorological Glossary" published by the Meteorological Office of London in 1930, said on this subject:

Horse Latitudes. — The belts of calms, light winds and fine clear weather between the trade-wind belts and the prevailing westerly winds of higher altitudes. The belts move north and south after the sun in a similar way to the Doldrums. The name arose from the old practice of throwing overboard horses which were being transported to America or the West Indies when the ship's passage was unduly prolonged.

In the Netherlands the denomination "Paardenbredten" has been used, analogous to the original English word and to the current expression in German "Rossbreiten". It is certainly not an elegant expression, nor a very apt one, because the word (as derived from the original English definition) was applied from the beginning to the North Atlantic Ocean and not to the other Oceans.

The treatise of Bossen and Van der Zee states on page 150: "The regions often called those of high pressure (anti-cyclone) are characterised by feeble gradients, and consequently, by very light winds; these are the *belts of calms in the tropic of cancer and capricorn* which are called in English the "horse latitudes". This, probably, to distinguish them from the equatorial belts of calms (doldrums). But, contrary to the character of the latter, the "horse latitudes" do not comprise a belt around the earth, for which reason the designation "belt of tropical calms" gives a misleading idea. In reality these are the regions in eastern parts of the Ocean where the trade winds originate.

For this reason, the most correct expression, which comprises all — and includes some which are already used in the writings of the Netherlands Royal Meteorological Institute — is "the sub-tropical region of high pressure". It is true that this expression characterises solely a division of atmospheric pressure and has no direct relation with the signification of the words "horse latitudes", which have always been taken to imply the absence of winds. But in defining the region as one of high pressure, the absence of winds is directly implied.

Taking the above facts into consideration, the Royal Meteorological Institute of the Netherlands has defined the "horse latitudes" as: *The sub-tropical region of high pressure (Paardenbredten).*

* * *