

# Mysterious Tubular Clouds Defy Explanation

By Betsy Mason [✉](#) August 24, 2009 | 9:50 am | Categories: [Environment](#), [Miscellaneous](#), [Space](#)



These long, crazy-looking clouds can grow to be 600 miles long and can move at up to 35 miles per hour, causing problems for aircraft even on windless days.

Known as Morning Glory clouds, they appear every fall over Burketown, Queensland, Australia, a remote town with fewer than 200 residents. A small number of pilots and tourists travel there each year in hopes of “[cloud surfing](#)” with the mysterious phenomenon.

Similar tubular shaped clouds called [roll clouds](#) appear in various places around the globe. But nobody has yet figured out what causes the Morning Glory clouds.

This shot was captured by photographer Mick Petroff from his plane near Australia’s Gulf of Carpentaria.

*Image: Mick Petroff/[APOD](#)*

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## Comments (64)

Posted by: jswilkins | 08/24/09 | 10:44 am

In Australia, they happen every *autumn*, not every fall 😊

Posted by: AJ | 08/24/09 | 11:16 am

Oh noes!!!11!!! It's the Globular Warmzors!!! Run for your life!!!!

Posted by: Daniel\_Contogiannis | 08/24/09 | 12:10 pm

How stunning! It seems like Australia has a lot of amazing differences from the rest of the world. Can anyone tell me what sort of day these Morning Glory Clouds happen on? Is it nice sunny warm days or colder blah type days.

And what exactly is "Cloud Surfing"? haha.

Posted by: contactone | 08/24/09 | 12:55 pm

I wonder if the cause of those clouds aren't even in the sky, but in the earth. Could be magnetic fields or the make up of the earth's crust and magma in that region.

Posted by: spiralstaircase | 08/24/09 | 1:56 pm

Or its probably this.

[http://www.dailymotion.com/channel/tech/featured/video/x1ya8q\\_gravity-wave](http://www.dailymotion.com/channel/tech/featured/video/x1ya8q_gravity-wave)

Posted by: chrissowick | 08/24/09 | 2:21 pm

I'm surprised they're not called something like, wooly jumberwhumpas or persipityflumberoos.

Posted by: xznofile | 08/24/09 | 2:29 pm

it might be formed like sand ridges on a stream bed. A cline seperates higher altitude wind which cools the tops of the ridges causing the clouds,

Posted by: zav | 08/24/09 | 2:32 pm

jswilkins, in The States, autumn is fall and spring is spring. What is your autumn if it isn't fall, spring? What's the difference below the equator?

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Posted by: lazyeight | 08/24/09 | 2:33 pm

@chrissowick:I guess our southern friends missed the boat on that one. Persipity flumberoos, indeed!

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Posted by: Zac1 | 08/24/09 | 2:51 pm

Chemtrails. The Australian government is using invisible airplanes that spray out chemicals that will sterilize the citizens of Burketown. It's a fact, I read it on the intertubes.

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Posted by: mrugeles | 08/24/09 | 2:59 pm

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravity\\_wave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravity_wave)

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Posted by: nf | 08/24/09 | 3:25 pm

So, I shared this 'puzzle' with an atmospheric scientist friend, who had this to say ('spaghetti-clouds' is my fault):

“The “morning glory” is an atmospheric undular bore that happens only (as far as we know) over the cape york peninsula in Australia, and is a result of two interacting sea breeze fronts from the two coasts with the triangular peninsula. Roger Smith has published quite extensively on the phenomenon, and it is well known in meteorological circles. That said, what you sent me is a wonderful photo. Spaghetti clouds indeed!”

Enjoy.

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Posted by: flavor13 | 08/24/09 | 3:30 pm

I read once clouds like this form when a newly formed cloud casts a shadow on the ground, cooling it so that the evaporation that formed the cloud stops. The wind then moves the cloud forward, letting the sun heat up the ground again and so restarting the process. Either that or its the magic cloud fairies having some fun.

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Posted by: cadex | 08/24/09 | 3:58 pm

wow, those white lines go a long way

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Posted by: defalkner | 08/24/09 | 4:16 pm

Aliens!... Duh.

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Posted by: TitusCooker | 08/24/09 | 5:02 pm

Touched by his noodly appendage?

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Posted by: Amagill | 08/24/09 | 5:10 pm

Pretty lite on info for a front page article. Some big brain has to have a theory about this.

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Posted by: kuei | 08/24/09 | 5:21 pm

“In Australia, they happen every autumn, not every fall”

Please remember Australia is half a year ahead of us.

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Posted by: rodria99 | 08/24/09 | 5:32 pm

Crimeny croc's! Them cirrus clouds went all amucks, tumbling below into this cloud fodderoo.

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Posted by: pellinore74 | 08/24/09 | 5:43 pm

Methinks the Almighty has a cocaine problem... I'm just sayin'

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Posted by: mreid2005 | 08/24/09 | 6:29 pm

1. Autumn, is Fall....

and if you going to take time to write an article.. fricken write a real article.. you state, causing problems for aircraft even on windless days.. how about explain how this causes said problems.. put some flesh in it.. otherwise put it on flickr, not on wired.

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Posted by: usedupguy | 08/24/09 | 6:32 pm

The first thing that comes to mind is photo shop. If it's not a fake, what a wonderful set of clouds.  
<http://betterlifearticles.typepad.com>

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Posted by: imprimisveritas | 08/24/09 | 6:35 pm

Propaganda. It's mental pollution.

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Posted by: LandShark | 08/24/09 | 7:32 pm

Maybe it is God...you know...

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Posted by: mystixa | 08/24/09 | 7:41 pm

so ... how do they 'cause' problems for aircraft?

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Posted by: Zapster | 08/24/09 | 7:41 pm

I don't think these clouds occur in Australia only, I saw clouds like these on my way to work earlier this month in Amarillo, Texas. I was disappointed I did not have my camera with me at the time. I have a web cam pointed out my window at home that has motion detection software running and it caught the tubular clouds going by. The software usually does not trigger on clouds but these clouds were low, fast moving and it happened early in the morning so there was good contrast. Driving under the cloud I could see that it extended to the horizon. The terrain is very flat here with few trees so visibility was good. There were 3 tubes with the first being very well formed and the following 2 were a little ragged if I remember correctly.

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Posted by: matrix | 08/24/09 | 7:58 pm

Zapster: Interesting observation, I saw the same series of clouds over Amarillo, Texas. The clouds seemed to develop in front of an early morning cold front after a night of heavy thunderstorms. The guys at work joked that it was a yankees secret way of sending reefer to Mexico

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Posted by: ripvanwinkle | 08/24/09 | 8:25 pm

Any glider pilot knows what these are. The technical name is "lenticular wave clouds". they take a variety of different formations, depending on the ground terrain and the upper atmospheric wind conditions. Just google lenticular clouds. They form all over the world in the right conditions. They are indeed mysterious looking and beautiful at the same time!!

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Posted by: Cuddles | 08/24/09 | 8:33 pm

altocumulus standing lenticularis

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/pages/events/lenticular/lenticular.php>

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Posted by: kkano | 08/24/09 | 8:52 pm

Uh, did Betsy Mason just rip off the APOD and just fake-up an article that says they are unexplained? What is this, Fox news?

<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap090824.html>

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Posted by: UITDEV | 08/24/09 | 9:17 pm

Yep. Its Global warming doing that. You know, Algore's newest creation.

<http://www.discussglobalwarming.com/blog>

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Posted by: zbeekman | 08/24/09 | 9:28 pm

I see no science on this page, or over at discussglobalwarming.com (@UITDEV). Clearly this story was poorly ripped off from <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap090824.html> (@kkano). I remember (although not clearly enough) a fluid dynamicist/atmospheric scientist during a seminar for Princeton University's MAE department discussing this phenomenon. It seems very irresponsible to copy this

article almost verbatim from another source on the web and claim “Nobody has any idea how this happens!” because that is simply not true.

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Posted by: freddddddd | 08/24/09 | 9:39 pm

I have seen this once in the past thirty years in the Reno, Nevada area. It happened on a cool Fall day and remained in this formation for several hours before finally breaking up. Parts of one cloud seemed to break off one roll and then reform on the next in line.

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Posted by: aethr69 | 08/24/09 | 11:26 pm

looks like you got under a few people’s skin with this one Betsy. Maybe next time there might be a bit of research before going with a headline like you did.

On another note, it is interesting how the last cloud seems to stop dead at the coastline, unlike the other two.

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Posted by: Taiwanscw | 08/25/09 | 1:54 am

I saw clouds like this in South Dakota 20 years ago. We watched as huge balls of lighting shot from one end of the tube cloud, all the way down the tube, disappearing in the distant sky. We saw 5-6 of these cloud tubes side by side, but they were darker and lighting giant lighting balls shot down each of them at 50-70 second intervals. I’ve never seen anything like it, not ever. Lasted for almost an hour.

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Posted by: Neverbyte | 08/25/09 | 2:39 am

Geez, c’mon guys! Don’t you know this is where spaghetti comes from..?

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Posted by: electricity | 08/25/09 | 3:03 am

Chemtrails! Google it. How amazing would it be if instead of getting angry or rolling your eyes and brushing it off you could open your mind to all of the possibilities around you! A taxi driver told me to google chemtrails years ago and ever since I did I have been observing the sky and have been amazed at the result! Chemtrails are made at different times of day/year and in different shapes and shades. If you watch closely you can see the gigantic planes spreading them. I am amazed every time the sky above us is full of crosses or lines of supposed “clouds.” I certainly don’t remember a sky like that in my childhood, do you? When every alternative thinker or individual who cares to ask questions rather than blindly accepting what is told to them as “the truth” is labeled a loon or paranoid or a weirdo which in turn discourages any further questioning of “the truth” the result will be extreme disaster. For years now, our sky is being polluted with chemtrails, for the purpose of....? Govt officials have admitted a few times that some chemtrails are done for the purpose of reversing global warming! Why are not more people outraged by or at least questioning this? Please, just for fun, begin observing the sky. Just look up, on your way to work, on your way home, during lunch etc, different times of day, just look up and keep your eyes open. You wont believe what you see!

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Posted by: mattabular | 08/25/09 | 7:20 am

I'm pretty sure there's just one answer to this:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cthulhu>

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Posted by: Global\_Solutions | 08/25/09 | 7:52 am

Wow they look so uniformed, almost mechanical. Look like the leftovers from something atomic lol. Moisture, density and gravity gotta be a factor, so I would have to say the landscape plays a major role in making these. Nice pic

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Posted by: Biotele | 08/25/09 | 8:45 am

This reminds me of Tesla fans who claim that scalar energy weapons cause unusual cloud formations. It looks like these cloud are formed in the troughs of an invisible standing wave.

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Posted by: gomerT | 08/25/09 | 8:58 am

Not only did Betsy Mason rip this story off, now she censored my posts!!!

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I posted last night demanding that Betsy comment here in the comments section or through an update on the article why she felt it acceptable, as an editor no less, to repost someone else's article with her name and no credit.

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Let's hear from you Betsy, before you censor this one, too!

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Posted by: caferide | 08/25/09 | 8:59 am

I want to go "cloud surfing"! 😊

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Posted by: photoprinter | 08/25/09 | 9:15 am

@electricity.. Chemtrails! I figured someone would bring this up right away. It has got to be one of the most stupid conspiracy theory I have ever heard! How do you think aerosol vapor sprayed from a jet at 30,000 feet, drift down to earth? How far do you think it will drift before it falls? And as for the unmarked jets doing the spraying...most private and corporate jets are unmarked. I want to know if you also believe that clouds that look like animals, really are live creatures eating pollution out of the air like some of you folks do.

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Posted by: philko | 08/25/09 | 10:39 am

Would someone please Photoshop in a huge rolled up dollar bill? (Aussie dollar, of course)

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Posted by: PeterBrady | 08/25/09 | 2:34 pm

Electricity, I'm sure your taxi cab driver was formerly a PhD holding chemist in his home country and thus a credible source for scientific data, however, I can't help but wonder how a large jet flying at low

altitude (passing over the same area 3 times nonetheless) spraying chemicals out the back would go unnoticed.

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Posted by: jeramigarcia85 | 08/25/09 | 3:21 pm

autumn and fall are the same thing different wordage smart guy

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Posted by: pwn\_thyself | 08/25/09 | 4:27 pm

love the folks who didn't catch that jswilkins ended eir post with a winky emoticon... pretty sure the joke there is about the way english is spoken by the aussies v the way people in the states do.

betsy, read the link that the others are "calling" you on, care to share your side? (hell, maybe you posted there first, idk!)

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Posted by: joniscream | 08/25/09 | 4:48 pm

We can't even figure out whats causing a 600 mile long cloud, but we know for sure that there is man made global warming? Would everyone that understands what the word Voodoo means please stand up.

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Posted by: captinslog | 08/25/09 | 5:09 pm

If you notice the underside of the plane wing tells a different story. This definately is a tampered photo otherwise you would'nt see so scattered reflection.

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Posted by: KansasGirl | 08/25/09 | 5:28 pm

Looks like waves in the surf.

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1 [2 Next »](#)