

# THE SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR CLOUDWATCHERS

Read the text about the hobby of cloudwatching. Six paragraphs have been removed from the article. Choose from paragraph A-G the one which fits each gap. Write the letter.

## *Christopher Middleton learns to distinguish an altostratus from a cirrus at Britain's first Cloud Bar.*

High above the Lincolnshire coastline, a swirl of small white clouds moves slowly across a clear blue sky. In normal circumstances, you'd describe them as wispy and feathery. But because we're standing on the roof of Britain's first Cloud Bar, and it's decked out with wall charts, we assembled skygazers can identify the above-mentioned phenomena as *Cirrus fibratus*. For the moment anyway, since clouds only live for ten minutes (it says on the chart).

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"It's fantastic idea, this place," says off-duty fireman Peter Ward, who's brought his young family here. "Really inspiring."

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At the last count, membership of the Cloud Appreciation Society stood at 23,066, covering 82 nations and all kinds of skywatchers from hillwalkers to airline pilots. "We think that clouds are nature's poetry," says the society's founder Gavin Pretor-Pinney, author of *The Cloudspotter's Guide* (sales of 200,000 and still rising). "Clouds are for dreamers and their contemplation benefits the soul."

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"In fact, you don't really need to travel at all to see interesting clouds. You can just lie in your back garden and look upwards," he says. For many cloudwatchers, the most important factor is not so much geographical location, as your philosophical disposition.

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"That said, clouds can be tremendously exciting too," he adds. "The first cloud I noticed was at the age of four and a half. I saw this magnificent *Cumulonimbus*, with rays of sunshine sprouting out from behind. Even now, I love to see those towering great formations. In my mind, clouds are the last great wilderness available to us."

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Cloudspotters in search of similar experiences flock each autumn to North Queensland in Australia for the tube-shaped phenomenon known as *Morning Glory*. "You go up and surf the wave of air it creates," says Gavin Pretor-Pinney, whose follow up book is *The Wavewatcher's Companion*. "Even more thrilling is to travel through clouds on a hang-glider. The strange thing is, you put your hand inside a cloud, but although it's wet and chilly, there's no actual substance to it."

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There's something about clouds which appeals to the soul, Ian Loxley says. "The line I like best is the one that goes. 'Life is not measured by the number of breaths you take, but by the moments that take your breath away.'



A Gavin Pretor-Pinney explains why this is: "because of the stately way in which clouds move and the gradual rate at which they develop, contemplating them is akin to meditation," he says. "The mere act of sitting, watching and observing slows you down to their pace."

B Absolutely. And as well as stimulating the imagination, clouds get you out and about. The keeper of the Society's photo gallery, Ian Loxley, has been on cloud-seeking expeditions in places as far afield as Cornwall and Canada, though his favorite location is around his home in the Lincolnshire Wolds.

C The Cloud Appreciation Society website is full of reports of such encounters. Some, like that one, are in mid-air at close quarters, while others are miles below on the ground.

D Alto clouds are a good example. They are primarily made up of water droplets, making them appear as grey puffy masses. If you see these on a humid summer morning, watch out for a potential thunderstorm later.

E Yes, spend an hour here and you become an instant expert on telling your **altos** (four to six miles high) from your **cumulos** (anything lower). As for these, they don't start until eight miles up, and they're identifiable because of their long, thin, shape (the name of Latin means a strand of hair).

F And, like all such places, humans want to explore them. Glider pilot Mike Rubin not only flies inside clouds but rides on them. "You fly underneath, find the thermal lift that is generating this cloud, and climb up by circling inside it." He says. "Use the thermals, and on a good day, you can travel hundreds of kilometers."

G Other beachgoers aren't as convinced that the country has been crying out for a purpose-built pavilion like this, equipped with adjustable mirrors so that you don't even have to look up at the sky. But the world's nephophile community (that's cloud enthusiasts) would beg to differ, especially now that more changeable autumn weather offers fewer cloudless blue-sky scenarios, and lots more action of scudding and billowing kind.

