our use of precipitation-intensity descriptors. In the USA, drizzle is defined with a visibility criterion, a light rainfall rate is less than 2.5 mm h^{-1}, and heavy rain is more than 7.6 mm h^{-1}. But to put this in perspective, where we live in North Carolina, the two-year return period for maximum 15-minute precipitation is 23 mm which is equivalent to a rainfall rate of 92 mm h^{-1}! The storm in which we conducted our 'field experiment' was a small convective shower that we watched approach us from the north-west. The entire storm lasted about 10 minutes and we ended up with 5 mm in our raingauge, indicating a mean rainfall rate of 30 mm h^{-1}. Our estimate of 15–20 mm h^{-1} during the experiment was because it started raining significantly harder just after we returned indoors.

To address Mr Blackall's questions specifically: Were there puddles? Not really, because the terrain sloped and the rain had just started. Were there splashing drops hitting our lower legs? Absolutely. Did it make Wallis's running difficult? No. As avid joggers, we have all too commonly ended up running in worse downpours. The real problem we encountered with the experiment was that the thunder and lightning made it difficult for Peterson to maintain a normal walking speed.

Percentages in forecasts

It is a pity that Mr Grahame's summary of R. W. Riddaway's contribution to the meeting entitled "How accurate are weather forecasts?" (see *Weather*, **52**, pp. 163–164) did not contain what I felt was the most important component. This was that a study in the USA had shown that continual use of percentages in forecasts *improved the skill of the forecaster*. I do not recall that this was refuted from the audience, and I would submit that it is a compelling argument in favour of its adoption as standard practice.

Greenford, Middlesex **J. P. Turnbull**

Correction

Due to an error, the photograph of the glory (Fig. 7) on p. 247 of the August issue was printed upside-down.

News

Silver year for CRU*

The vagaries of the British weather are something we all have an opinion on; but for researchers in the Climatic Research Unit (CRU), University of East Anglia (UEA), it is a subject that they have spent the last 25 years analysing, bringing them world-wide acclaim and recognition. Today CRU is at the forefront of international studies into climate change, and their work has put Norwich and the UEA firmly on the research map.

CRU marked their 25th anniversary with a celebration dinner for current and ex-CRU members, a second International Climate and History Conference and a commemorative book *Climates of the British Isles, present, past and future*, published at the end of April.

Initially set up with a certain amount of scepticism from the scientific community, where the accepted view was that climate is largely constant on human time-scales, CRU has had a recognisable and continual presence at UEA since its inception in 1972. Hubert Lamb†, the Founding Director, supported by Professors Keith Clayton and Brian Funnell, consecutive Deans of Environmental Science, set up the Unit with the initial objective of establishing a record of climate over as much of the world as possible, from as far back in time as feasible, in as much detail as they could get! Quite a feat for the four people working at CRU in the early years.

CRU is now one of the world's leading centres for climate change research and its work receives international public recognition. This stems largely from the 1980s when, under the Directorship of Professor Tom Wigley, they raised the alarm on the greenhouse effect, influencing governments world-wide to take action on global warming. CRU also influenced the building of the Thames Barrier by advising Whitehall on the variability of North Sea storms.

Today CRU, directed by Professor Trevor Davies, undertakes studies for government departments, insurance companies, public utilities and environmental bodies and employs 25 researchers and 14 PhD students.

Commenting on the 25-year celebration, Professor Davies said: "The weather is something that will always be of interest to the public and to the scientific community but at CRU we have shown the significance of changes in climate to governments, industries and eco-systems throughout the world. Over the last 25 years we have firmly established ourselves amongst the world's leading experts in this field and intend to stay in that position for the next 25 and beyond."

* This article is reproduced from *Broadview* (18 April 1997), University of East Anglia, Norwich, with kind permission of the Editor, Anne Ogden.
† Sadly, Professor Hubert Lamb died on 28 June 1997. An obituary will appear in the *Quarterly Journal*.