

Storm blamed on jet stream that dive-bombed onto Cape

The Dec. 9 storm was nothing if not capricious.

While Mary Jane Gibson lost scores of trees on her Eastham property near Depot Pond, the town library next door didn't lose one.

James Costa, who has a stump removal business on the Lower Cape, checked fallen trees with his Global Positioning System and found damage running in lines from west to east.

"It seemed to have dropped down in some areas and decimated that area, then skipped 200 or 1,000 feet, then another burst came down," Costa said yesterday.

While the storm reminded some Cape residents of tornado damage, the jet stream was the culprit.

That wind, according to Don McCasland, program director at the Blue Hills Observa-

tory in Milton, was part of a weather event seen only three or four times in a century: A high-altitude air mass of heavy, dense cold air collided with a warmer, low pressure system.

The heavy air dropped like a roller coaster down a steep hill, displacing the lighter air mass below. In effect, the high altitude jet stream, which moves west to east, was dive-bombing to earth and slamming into Cape Cod with winds as high as 100 mph.

Topography also had a lot to do with the randomness of the damage, McCasland said.

Property on the east-facing side of a hill, or even downwind from a larger home, was sheltered from the worst winds.

— DOUG FRASER