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A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

By Dr. Charles F. Brooks
of Clark University.

FORECASTING AVALANCHES

Both in the Alps and in our own Rockies, the avalanche constitutes one of the chief menaces to mountain dwellers and mountain climbers in winter and early spring. If it were possible to predict these destructive snow slides, many accidents might be averted. It is known that "avalanches tend to follow the same tracks. Sometimes they only descend two or three times a century; most commonly they are annual but then of rather limited dimensions; at variable intervals they may take on catastrophic proportions."

Avalanches occur with such suddenness and appear to be started by such slight causes that the exact moment of their release cannot be foreseen. Apparently the dry, powdery avalanches of the high mountains occur mostly in winter and usually coincide with a drop in temperature. The more common "ground avalanche" of wet snow is generally preceded by a thaw and may occur in either spring or winter. A heavy snowfall favors avalanches, particularly on treeless slopes, but does not necessarily produce them. "Perhaps the most dangerous combination is a marked rise in temperature accompanied by a fall of soft snow and a southwest wind. Even the firing of a gun or the falling of a small stone, not to mention on the approach of a railroad train, have been known to start a slide.

Misfit Weather From the South)

(Tomorrow:

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