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A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DANGER FROM LIGHTNING

What is the safest thing to do in a severe thunderstorm? Lightning is often so freakish that it is impossible to say where it will strike, but in some locations the risk is greater than others. Indoors one should avoid a telephone, wires or pipes, chimneys, in fact anything which offers lightning a good path into the house. However, it is generally safer to be indoors than out during a thunderstorm and very much safer if the house has a well grounded metallic roof or properly installed lightning rods. If one must remain outdoors a valley is safer than a ridge or hill. A good place to stop an auto is in a cut between high banks. It is always dangerous to seek shelter under a single tall tree. Even in a forest, the tallest trees should be avoided. People outdoors in a thunderstorm are likely to try to keep dry. Dr. W. J. Humphreys says it would be safer to get soaking wet, as wet clothes are much better conductors, and dry ones much poorer, than the human body. That is, if the clothing is wet, the discharge is likely to go through the clothes to the ground. If the clothing is dry, it may pass through the body. If one is caught in a violent storm on an open field or plain, a golf course, for example, probably it is safest to lie flat on the wet ground.

(Tomorrow: The Sunny North Pole)

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