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A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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CLEARING THE AIR

Fine weather after wet days confirms the common idea that "rain clears the air". To some extent this is true. Rain falling through the air will wash out a certain amount of soot and dust. Also, of course, rain by stopping a forest fire may clear the air indirectly. But it should be noted that only in calm quiet weather does the air washed by Saturday's rain remain with us till Sunday or Monday. More commonly most of the rain washed air has travelled on, perhaps 500 or 1000 miles, displaced by a cool dry wind from a westerly direction which brings the clear weather. Without leaving home we get a "change of air".

Cases when it clears without raining illustrate well this change of air. If a light southerly wind has been bringing in forest fire smoke and producing a thick haze, a change of the wind to northwest or north will often clear the air remarkably without rain. But if forest fires lie to the west or northwest, the usual westerly wind after a rain will soon make the air more hazy than before the shower, unless the rain has been sufficient to put out the fires.

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(Tomorrow: Rain Shadows)

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