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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AUTUMN SNOWS

Winter begins early in the Northern Plains region. At Helena, Montana, for example, they had over a foot of snow this September. In October it was so cold that nearly all the precipitation was snow, making over two feet more. From this you might guess that Helena must be pretty well buried by this time. Not at all! The Northwestern Plains states get most of their snowfall early and late in the season. In mid-winter, it may snow, to be sure, but with the temperature falling sometimes to minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit. The air is so cold and dry that not enough moisture is available for a heavy fall. Only a few inches of fine dry snowflakes can be expected in most storms.

In the lake region and in the East, similarly, you will notice that the heaviest snows usually occur with the temperature not much below freezing. But the climate is not cold and dry enough to cause an appreciable reduction of snowfall in mid-winter.

(Tomorrow: Storm Cirro-Stratus Clouds)
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