

A Science Service Feature

February 15, 1926

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed Feb. 8, 1926

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TRANSCONTINENTAL STORMS ON SOUTHERN ROUTE

The diversity of weather found along the path of a single transcontinental winter storm is most surprising. A large low pressure area strikes the western coast with strong winds and heavy rains, thunderstorms here and there, deep snows on the mountains and but moderate to light snows and rains on the plateaus. The low crosses the plains, marked at first simply by some cloudiness, a depression of the barometer, varying winds, and a temperature fluctuation. Feeling the energizing breath of muggy air from the Gulf of Mexico, the storm gathers strength. Down-pours and thunderstorms commence. Locally there is a tornado. A great cloud sheet pours out overhead and runs as a herald far before the storm. Along the Atlantic coast the northeast wind begins to rise as storm warnings are broadcast. Now the low is reaching into colder reservoirs of air, and snow rather than rain begins to mark its progress.

With increasing contrasts between its warm and cold sides and with growing intensity as the winds whirl about the low center, the storm drops its freezing rain on wires and trees, or dumps its swirling tons of snow on puny man and his buildings. In a belt 200 to 250 miles northwest or north of the path of the center, the snowstorm and gale are well-nigh smothering. A hundred miles farther away the snowfall and winds are but moderate.

This is the usual story of a transcontinental low crossing the country south of latitude 40 in the winter. When it happens to place its snowiest belt directly across the densely populated region from eastern Pennsylvania and southern New York through Connecticut and eastern Massachusetts, millions of people must flounder and dig.

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