

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"FOSSIL" WEATHER RECORDS

It is well known that old tree trunks extend our rainfall records back a surprisingly long time, hundreds and even thousands of years in the less humid portions of the West. The width of each annual ring, Dr. A. E. Douglass has shown, indicates, to some extent, the wetness of the season. In years of drought the trees may make scarcely any growth, while a good season produces a wide ring. In parts of the Southwest, the sequence of seasons is so well shown in tree rings that it is possible to determine the relative ages of Indian pueblos by examining the logs used in their construction.

Perhaps it is less often noted that old forests also yield records of particular storms. Where whirling tornadoes have occurred, old logs lie criss-cross in confusion, "fossil tornadoes" as Prof. R. DeC. Ward has picturesquely called them. For decades after a tornado has cut a swath through a forest its path may be seen in the smaller trees or the different character of the new growth. The record of another type of heavy wind, the thundersquall or the hurricane, is different. These are mostly straight blows that lay the trunks nearly parallel.

Immediately after a severe local wind has occurred, the character of the damage is sometimes the only means of establishing whether or not there was a twisting tornado or simply a straight squall.

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