

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LOCAL INDICATIONS OF RAIN

If weather forecasts and maps are not available, one must depend on the interpretation of local signs and his own experience in concluding whether a storm is approaching. Certain points are easy to remember: that increasing cloudiness precedes rain; shifting winds cause a change in the weather, southerly winds bringing warmer and wetter, and northerly ones cooler and drier conditions, while northeasterly winds mark the beginning of a long storm and southwesterly ones its approaching end.

All these observations can be made without instruments. A barometer, however, should improve our home-made forecasts. In winter, particularly, when "highs" and "lows" are well marked and move rapidly, the barometer reading is worth noting. At sea level the barometer usually stands at about 30.1 or 30.2 inches during established fair weather.

As a storm approaches the barometer falls, at a quickening rate, perhaps to 29.7 or 29.6. After the center of the "low" passes, the barometer rises again. However, it is well to remember that the actual height of the barometer in winter affords little indication of the chances of rain and that even change in pressure does not give an accurate forecast. The greater the pressure change, the greater is the likelihood of rain or snow, however. In the upper Mississippi Valley a rapid fall of the barometer is followed by measurable precipitation in winter less than one-third of the time, but by flurries of snow or traces of rain about two-thirds of the time. Nearer the coast the chances are probably better, though adequate statistical studies of this question have not yet been made.

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