

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A BLIND ALLEY FOR LOWS

Accustomed as we are to the rather smooth progress of weather from west to east, it is interesting, even if disconcerting to the local forecaster, to note the occasional formation of a blind alley for lows. This spring there was an uncommon tendency for low pressure areas to get stuck in a blind alley in the northern Midwest.

It is well known that the general winds at heights of two to five miles or more tend to blow parallel to the boundaries between widespread areas of higher and lower temperature. In this hemisphere, the direction is to the right of the temperature gradient from hot to cold. In other words, since it is usually colder in the North than in the South, the general winds come from the west. And, of course, with these winds drifts the procession of highs and lows that attend our frequent weather changes.

When coldness over the western plateaus and warmth over the plains turns the temperature gradient from its normal direction, midwestern lows tend northward rather than eastward. When, at the same time, chilly conditions prevail over the northeast, the general trend of the winds turns from southwest to northwest, about the Mississippi River. So a low moving northward or northeastwards over the plains may reach the headwaters of the Mississippi only to find itself in a blind alley where it must either die for lack of sustaining warmth and moisture, or nearly turn about and fight its way over a long battle line to the southeast, whence it can make its way northward over the Atlantic. The southern plains and Gulf coast and the south Atlantic coast get good rains, the central and northern plains settled, dry, warm weather and the northeastern and eastern interior settled dry, cool weather.

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