

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DRIVING IN A THUNDERSTORM

"During a thunderstorm I was following a car along an open stretch of road, when suddenly I saw lightning strike the auto ahead. The machine careened off the road and upset. The driver, crushed by the car, was dead when I reached him. While he may have been killed outright by the lightning, he was, perhaps, only stunned or possibly only one arm violently contracted by the stroke. I don't drive during thunderstorms anymore, if I get caught in one I pull up under a bank or stop in some woods till it is past."

It is well known that in open country a projection is more likely to get struck by lightning than another place. Thus an auto as well as an upright man or a tree is in danger. A machine is not less likely to get struck because it is in motion. Jove does not aim his thunderbolts at an auto and miss his mark. Lightning is not a projectile. It is a great flow of electrons along a concentrated path, in which auto, if hit, and cloud both play a part. When the difference in potential between cloud and earth becomes great enough the discharge will take place along the path offering at the moment the least resistance.

By going directly into the oncoming storm one may, by driving, pass through the storm sooner and be subject to its hazards for a shorter time, it is true. But unless the route is in the protection of woods all the way and unless due care is taken to avoid skidding on the slippery roadway but dimly visible through blurred windshield, the progress may not be worth the risk. The excitement, the tendency to hurry, and the ever present possibility of a shock from lightning are also worthy of consideration.

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