

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE SOO BLOCKADE

Early in December, 1926, over a hundred lake freighters were caught in a great ice blockade in the St. Mary's river, that connects Lake Superior with Lake Huron. The blockade was finally broken by the efforts of tugs and a giant ice-breaking car ferry-boat. C. L. Ray, of Sault Ste. Marie, says that ice jams in the St. Mary's river are common in spring, but exceptional in early winter. The only other instance in Weather Bureau records there, which extend back to 1888, was the ice blockade of December, 1906.

Both in 1926 and 1906 a number of days on which the temperature fell below zero preceded the blockade. The daily averages were 15 to 25 degrees below normal; for the four days preceding the recent blockade the figure being 6 degrees Fahrenheit above zero, and the four days before the 1906 one, 5 degrees Fahrenheit above zero. The three days following the start of the tie-up of vessels also show temperatures closely agreeing, says Mr. Ray, averaging 9 degrees in 1926 and 8 degrees in 1906. In 1926 the situation was complicated by a blizzard, the mixture of snow and water clogging the vessels' motive machinery.

It might be thought that ship-masters would seek to avoid the possibility of an expensive tie-up at the Soo, but the economic pressure is great for as many trips as possible during the open season. Even in mid-December, the usual time when navigation on the Great Lakes closes, 14 boats laden with Canadian wheat were stopped by ice at the Soo, and were unable to return to Ft. William, since the Canadian ports on Lake Superior froze up after these ships left but before they could get to the eastern outlet of Lake Superior. Anyway, Michigan people are cordial, and are glad to entertain the crews, and outfit them in the spring.

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