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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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CAR WINDOW CLIMATOLOGY

A cross-country train ride by day may be highly illuminating climatologically to the interested traveler. Such changes as one experiences between the snow-covered most northern districts and the brown, then light green, the fruit blossom, and finally the leafy regions as one goes southward are naturally taken as a matter of course, even though such contrasts are remarkably great over short distances in the East at this time of year. We also expect to see highlands frosty of mornings and their vegetation noticeably behind that of lowlands.

Contrasts in rainfall are not so commonly noted, for our East is well watered generally. But a day's ride westward across the Great Plains reveals the increasing dryness in a number of ways. The country, well wooded in the east, gives way to more and more open landscape. Swamps decrease. Cornfields yield to sorghum grains. Uncultivated grasslands become more and more numerous. Cattle become congregated into herds. The farms increase in size - not because the people are more wealthy, but because each farm family must have a larger area of drier land in order to make a living. Tumble weeds, spikey plants, cacti, occasional dune areas bespeak the increasing aridity. Even the soil shows the change. No longer does it have the prairie blackness; it assumes a semi-arid light brown or reddish color. And a rocky layer begins to appear at a depth first of several feet, but later closer and closer to the surface. This zone of carbonate accumulation represents the depth to which the meager rainfall can carry the mineral salts from the surface layers.

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