

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DEW PONDS

The Down country of southern England is one of the few places in the world where the people go to the hilltops to seek water in time of drought. On the summit of the Downs are found many artificial shallow ponds, most of them very old. The bottom of these ponds consists of a layer of puddled chalk or clay and is impervious to water, so that there is no loss by seepage. It is a remarkable fact that when wells and springs in the valleys below fail on account of protracted dry weather, the upland ponds still contain water. According to popular belief, they are fed by dew, and hence they are known as "dew ponds". Kipling refers to them in his poetical description of Sussex:

"We have no waters to delight  
Our broad and brookless vales --  
Only the dew pond on the height  
Unfed, that never fails."

In recent years some careful studies of dew ponds have been made by Mr. Edward A. Martin and he has published a book about them, besides several papers in scientific journals. The net result of his investigations is that dew contributes little to the water supply of these ponds. The rainfall on the hilltops is somewhat greater than in the valleys, and the principal part of the water in the ponds is undoubtedly derived from this source. It is supplemented, however, by wet fogs which frequently drift in from the sea. Water from these fogs is caught by vegetation and then drains off into the ponds.

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