

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LIGHTNING PRINTS

The belief that lightning sometimes impresses photographic images on the human skin is one of those fallacies that no amount of "exploding" suffices to kill. Hardly a year passes in which cases of this alleged phenomenon are not reported in the newspapers. The images are usually said to be those of trees; sometimes of leaves.

The truth underlying these tales is that ramifying pink marks, bearing some resemblance to trees or to the venation of leaves, are often found on the bodies of those who have been struck by lightning, with or without fatal results. These marks are called "lightning prints". They generally fade out of sight in a few days. They are in no sense photographs, but merely the lesions due to the passage through the tissues of a branching electrical discharge. The heat generated by such a discharge against resistance accounts for the alteration of the tissues, as in the case of other electrical injuries.

The correct explanation of lightning prints was first given by Rindfleisch in 1862.

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