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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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RECORDS OF ANCIENT RAINSTORMS

Raindrops that fell millions of years ago have left their impressions in the rocks. This has happened where the rain fell on a muddy surface, after which sand or some other light material drifted over it and filled up the little pits made by the drops. Finally both the mud and the overlying material hardened into rock, and today we find "fossil rain-drops," which in some cases are the original pits and in others are the casts of the material with which they were filled. The shapes of these "rain-prints" sometimes show clearly the direction from which the wind was blowing at the time of the prehistoric rainstorm.

These fossils give some slight indication of the relative raininess of different regions in the remote past, and of one geological epoch as compared with another.

Another sort of rain record, less ancient though dating back hundreds of years, is found in the annual rings of old trees, as revealed in cross sections of their trunks. Thick rings are supposed to have been formed during periods of abundant rainfall and thin rings when the rainfall was deficient, but as other things besides rain probably helped determine the thickness of the rings, there is some doubt about how far this kind of record can be trusted.

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