

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

THE MOST FAMOUS CLOUD IN THE WORLD

The "Tablecloth" that occasionally caps the flat top of Table Mountain, in South Africa, has been described in numerous books of travel ever since the latter part of the seventeenth century. It consists of a sheet of dense cloud, formed when warm, moisture-bearing winds are forced up the steep slope of the mountain, especially in summer. The cloud often pours over the brow of the mountain, like a mighty cataract, and is dissolved as the wind is warmed by compression in descending to a lower level. The effects produced by this rolling mass of vapor are sometimes indescribably grand. The phenomenon is all the more striking because a perfectly clear sky generally prevails over the surrounding country while the Tablecloth overspreads the mountain.

The cloud forms very rapidly and persons climbing the mountain often find themselves suddenly enveloped in it and are obliged either to remain stationary for hours or take serious risk in attempting to find their way through the thick mist.

Thanks to the moisture deposited by the Tablecloth, the summit of Table Mountain is clothed with luxuriant vegetation throughout the almost rainless summers that prevail in this region.

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SCIENCE SERVICE,
21st and B Sts.,
Washington, D.C.