

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 20, 1927

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REMOVING ICE JAMS

Professor Howard T. Barnes, F.R.S., of McGill University, is the father of the new art of "ice engineering," the purpose of which is to protect mankind from hazards and inconveniences due to ice in various forms. One of its tasks, for example, is to minimize the danger of icebergs, and another is to break up the great ice jams that form in northern rivers and are responsible for serious floods.

The enormous heat developed by thermit (a mixture of aluminum and iron oxide) has proved to be the most powerful agency for destroying large masses of ice. Professor Barnes has used it with success in breaking up icebergs, and its application to ice jams has yielded such results that it seems likely to replace dynamite, with which obstructions have generally been attacked in the past.

The first ice jam ever treated with thermit was one at Waddington, N.Y., which was removed in February, 1925, with three thermit units, of 90 pounds each. Two hundred and fifty thousand tons of ice moved out within a few hours after treatment. The largest ice jam thus far tackled by Professor Barnes was one 25 miles in extent, formed in the Allegheny River in the spring of 1926, which, he says, "was successfully treated and removed without damage to property in about ten days."

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