

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed March 9, 1928

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COUNTING CHIMPANZEES

"When a flash of lightning is seen and the resulting thunder heard, how can you determine the distance the storm is from you?"

This is one of the questions propounded in the "Weather" manual recently published by the Boy Scouts of America. The answer depends upon two facts. First, that the passage of light from the lightning discharge to your eye is practically instantaneous. Second, that sound travels through the air at an average speed of about a fifth of a mile a second.

Hence if you count the number of seconds elapsing between the time you see a flash and the time you begin to hear the thunder and then divide this number by five, you get the approximate distance of the storm in miles. Naturally the best way to count the seconds is to use a stop-watch.

A rough-and-ready way to do it, says the Boy Scout manual, is to count "chimpanzees". You say, "One chimpanzee, two chimpanzees, three chimpanzees," and so on, as long as necessary. The **number of** chimpanzees counted, if one talks at average speed, is very nearly equal to the number of seconds.

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