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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A DARK DAY AT MONTREAL

"Dark days" occur every few years in eastern Canada and the northeastern United States, for reasons that are now fairly well understood, though they were once a subject of much controversy. The darkness is due to smoke from fires - generally from burning forests - and its special prevalence in the region mentioned results of barometric depressions leave the continent by way of the St. Lawrence from the fact that a great majority/valley, where they generally become intensified and sharply defined. If a big fire is in progress anywhere within the borders of such a depression it tends to be drawn toward the storm center by the surface winds. Sometimes there are dense local accumulations of the smoke above the level of the lower clouds, so that the cause of the darkness is masked, and thus the phenomenon is all the more startling.

The following is a typical early account of a dark day, as observed at Montreal "in the summer of 1832 or 1833" by an English officer, Major Stack:

"The morning set in fine, calm and clear. The day, however, darkened between 11 and 12 noon, and threatened rain or wet mist. No rain, however, fell, nor was there any mist or fog. About 12 the darkness became visible, if I may so say, and the sun had the appearance as if looked at through red glass. At 1 o'clock the sun was quite obscured. We could not then see to read in the houses, and we were obliged to light candles. About 2 o'clock it was as dark as a dark night. People driving in the streets were running against each other, as you may have witnessed in a dense fog. We could not see each other's faces two or three yards off, and nervous people became very much alarmed...A change took place a little after 2 or half past 2 o'clock, and from that time the obscuration began to clear away as gradually as it came on. About 5 p.m. it was clear enough for people to return to their business and the candles were extinguished in our mess room."

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