

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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MIRAGE AT SEA

Mirage is a familiar sight to sailors, and its observation probably explains the legend of the Flying Dutchman, as well as some of the other strange tales of the sea. There are accurate descriptions of the phenomenon that read like fairy tales. William Scoresby, Jr., the Arctic voyager, has left us a vivid account of seeing his father's ship inverted in the sky. With his glass he could make out the details of masts and hull, though the vessel was 34 miles distant and nearly 15 miles beyond the horizon. Dr. C.A. Reeds has recorded the case of a ship that was expected to arrive at New York from England during the colonial period. He tells us that "on a Sunday afternoon, after a violent storm, she was seen floating in the air, every spar represented so clearly that there was no question of the identity of the vessel thus painted in the clouds; but that was the last ever seen of the ill-fated ship."

In the history of polar exploration there are two cases in which mirage gave rise to faulty geography. In the first case Commander Wilkes was led astray by mirage and charted the coast of the Antarctic continent in the wrong place. The second case was that of the mythical "Crocker Land," which Peary thought he discovered in 1906. After it had figured on the maps for some years it was proved to be non-existent, but the expedition that went north to explore it observed the same mirage by which Peary had been misled.

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