

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AN INCH OF RAIN

The story is told of the English gardener who, having undertaken for the first time in his life to read a rain-gauge, reported that the rainfall was "between a pint and a pint and a half". Rain is, of course, generally measured in terms of depth and not volume. In English-speaking countries it is usually measured in inches and fractions thereof.

Now an inch is not a unit that suggests big things. When an astronomer mentions a 100-inch telescope the average layman does not suspect that he is referring to the "aperture" of the instrument and is talking about the biggest telescope ever constructed. So it is with rainfall figures. An inch of rainfall seems an insignificant amount until we learn that it means 113 tons of water to the acre. An inch of rain falling over one square mile yields 72,320 tons of water.

The amount of water falling in a single widespread shower is often prodigious. It can be measured with reasonable accuracy wherever rain-gauges are prevalent. In India, for example, where rain is a subject of absorbing interest and is measured at hundreds of places, there is a record of a shower that fell over an area of about 10,000 square miles. The numerous gauge readings taken within this area indicated a total fall of something like 7,000,000,000 tons of water.

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