

Released on receipt
but intended for use
October 2, 1928

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed September 25, 1928

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

SASTRUGI

Commander Byrd, true to his name, is going to fly in the Antarctic where previous explorers have trudged or sledged. He will thus escape, among other things, the formidable obstacle presented by the wind-formed dunes of snow, called sastrugi in polar literature, which are so common in that part of the world.

Sastrugi are interesting to the physical geographer, and their name is even more interesting to the lexicographer. This name is applied to a snow formation characteristic of wind-swept plains; especially those where the winds tend to blow constantly in one direction, so that these snow ridges are more or less permanent and serve to indicate the points of the compass. This characteristic of snow ridges in northern Siberia was noted a century ago by Baron von Wrangel, and the Russian name for these ridges, "zastrugi", Germanized to "sastrugi", was made familiar by the narrative of Wrangel's travels.

When the late Captain Scott was writing his Antarctic journals he often had occasion to refer to a single snow dune. The singular of "zastrugi" in Russian is "zastruga", but Scott apparently thought "sastrugi" was a Latin word and accordingly he referred to a single specimen as a "sastrugus". Several subsequent writers have followed his example. It will be interesting to see what the next editions of the English dictionaries say about all this.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

SCIENCE SERVICE,
21st and B Sts.,
Washington, D.C.