

A Science Service Feature

Released on receipt  
but intended for use  
January 29, 1929

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed January 22, 1929

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AVALANCHE WINDS

No winds on earth, with the possible exception of tornadoes, are more violent or more destructive within limited areas than the blasts that rush out in front of a large and rapidly descending avalanche or landslide. These winds fell big trees, demolish houses and tear to shreds the clothing of persons exposed to them.

In January, 1917, an avalanche occurred on one slope of a ravine at the foot of Mount Juneau, Alaska. On the opposite bank of the ravine, more than 50 feet above its bed, stood three cabins. Though these buildings were untouched by the descending snow, they were blown to pieces by the avalanche wind and their fragments were carried 100 feet up the slope. In the city of Juneau, the nearest part of which was a quarter of a mile from where the avalanche occurred, a lateral gust filled the air with a blinding whirl of snow and the town was enveloped in a pall of semi-darkness that lasted several minutes.

In the year 1819 an ice avalanche, detached from a glacier, descended the precipitous flank of the Weisshorn, in Switzerland, falling a distance of 9,000 feet. Near the place where it came to rest was the village of Randa. No part of the village was touched by the ice, but the wind scattered the houses like chaff; the steeple of the church, a massive building of stone, was broken down; millstones were lifted from the ground and deposited at points several yards higher; and ponderous beams were blown into a forest nearly a mile away.

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21st and B Sts.,  
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