

A Science Service Feature

Released on receipt
but intended for use
September 12, 1929.

? WEY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 5, 1929.

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RAIN-PRINTS IN THE ROCKS

Rainstorms that occurred scores of millions of years before there were any umbrellas or human beings to carry them have left their records in the rocks, in the shape of what geologists call "rain-prints", or sometimes "fossil raindrops". The drops of the ancient shower pitted a surface of soft sand or mud, into which other material was drifted by the wind, and the impressions were thus preserved until, in the course of ages, the substance had hardened into rock.

Rain-prints throw a good deal of light upon the climate and weather of past geological epochs. The fossils accompanying the prints and other characteristics of the rocks indicate approximately how long ago the showers occurred. The shapes of the prints show the direction and force of the wind that prevailed during the shower. Thus if the wind blew from the south, the southern side of the depression will slope gradually downward toward the opposite side. The greater the contrast in steepness between the opposite slopes, the stronger must have been the wind.

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