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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 7, 1929.

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

HOW COMMON ARE WATERSPOUTS?

Waterspouts are fairly common phenomena in the sense that, in the whole world, there are probably hundreds of them every year. In the experience of the individual observer, however, they are decidedly rare. Many sailors never see one in the course of their lives.

Years ago the British Meteorological Office assembled a great fund of weather data relating to a large area of the tropical Atlantic Ocean. The region in question comprised the nine 10-degree squares lying between the parallels of 20 degrees North and 10 degrees South, and between the meridians of 10 degrees West and 40 degrees West. The data were extracted from the logs of 1,159 British ships sailing within this area during the years 1854-1871, inclusive. Observations of waterspouts were included, and these have been analyzed with the following results:

In the whole of this great area, which is traversed by several important trade routes, 73 waterspouts were observed in the 18 years; an average of about 4 a year. Most striking is the fact that 39 of these spouts, or more than half the total number, were encountered in one of the nine squares; viz, the one bounded by the parallel of 10 degrees North and the equator and by the meridians of 20 degrees and 30 degrees West. This fact confirms the familiar textbook statement that the doldrum region of the Atlantic is one of the favorite breeding grounds of waterspouts, but also shows that even there the frequency of these objects is only relative.

Everywhere on the ocean waterspouts are so uncommon that the appearance of one is always one of the sensational episodes of shipboard life.

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