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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AN ENCOUNTER WITH A DUST WHIRL

The dust whirlwinds of deserts and dry plains, known in the southwestern United States as "twisters", bear a superficial resemblance to tornadoes, though different in their mode of origin. That they are sometimes of considerable violence is indicated by the following narrative, for which we are indebted to S. D. Flora, of the U. S. Weather Bureau:

On May 17, 1927, L. W. Gilbert, a traveling engineer of the Santa Fe Railway, was in the cab of the front engine of a double-header Santa Fe passenger train about 25 miles west of Dodge City, Kansas, when the enginemen noticed a high, dark column, which they took at first to be a prairie fire, possibly 15 miles to the southwest. As it approached they realized that it was a good-sized dust whirl, headed across their path as they sped westward at the rate of 60 miles an hour.

When the whirl struck, with an impact that was distinctly felt in the huge engine, it was impossible to see across the cab for several seconds. When they had run out of it, they discovered that the engine bell was missing, and that the shield of the superstructure over the steam dome and the pop valve were torn loose. The glass on the south side of the front locomotive was broken out, and both engines were covered with dirt and sand.

The sky was entirely clear at the time and there was no sign of the wildly rushing clouds from which the funnel of a tornado usually descends.

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