

Released upon receipt
but intended for use,
December 30, 1929.

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 23, 1929.

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

THE ICE-FRINGED DITTANY

Though botanizing is out of season, one of the most interesting spectacles afforded by the plant world now awaits the attentive observer in the woods, where, on a frosty morning, he may happen upon a clump of dead stems of the dittany (*Cunila origanoides*) decorated with the delicate ribbons or shell-like whorls of ice known as "ice fringes".

These curious appendages are not deposited from the atmosphere, after the manner of hoarfrost, but are formed from water that rises from the soil inside the plant stems. They are about as thick as a knifeblade, and one, two or several may be found on a single stem. When they assume the ribbon form they sometimes grow to a length of six or seven inches and they are from half an inch to two inches wide.

The origin of these fringes is a scientific puzzle. Nobody has ever explained why the water does not freeze inside the stems, but only at the surface, or why the ice assumes the form of a thin projecting ribbon rather than a coating spread over the plant.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

SCIENCE SERVICE,
23rd and B Sts.,
Washington, D.C.