

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"FREAK" WEATHER

Probably the majority of atmospheric events that are popularly classified as "freak" weather are those that occur out of season or in a region where they are rarely experienced. For example, the memorable cold wave that prevailed in the United States in February, 1899, was of unprecedented severity, but the fact about it that seemed most extraordinary was that it spread so far south as to give the Gulf Coast a taste of zero weather. The terrific hot waves that occur in the interior of our continent in summer, often accompanied by intense drought, are economic events of much importance, but they are appropriate to a continental climate and are too common to attract more than transient notice. When, however, several years ago, a temperature of 100 was registered in London the episode seemed nothing short of a prodigy, because England has a marine climate, in which great extremes of temperature are almost unknown.

Inversions of the seasons in the shape of warm spells in winter and cold spells in summer always arouse general interest and bring to the fore, outside of scientific circles, those favorite standbys in the explanation of weather irregularities, sunspots and the Gulf Stream; just as, in former ages, similar untimely occurrences inspired pious tracts and sermons concerning manifestations of the Divine Will.

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