A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
March 11, 1930

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed March 4, 1930

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

OIL WELLS AND RAINFALL

In the petroleum industry there appears to be a rather prevalent belief that the development of a new oil or gas field is accompanied by an abnormal amount of rainfall. A notion of this sort necessarily leads to attempts to explain the supposed phenomenon, and the explanation offered in this case is that gas discharged into the air from the wells favors the condensation and precipitation of moisture. The amount of gas wasted during the development of new oil and gas fields was enormous before the days of conservation, and it is still considerable.

L. G. E. Bignell, a petroleum engineer, has gone to some pains to compare the history of oil-drilling operations in different parts of the United States with the local weather records, and he finds, as might be expected, that in some cases the rainfall was above the normal during the development of new fields, though in many other cases it was not. The real reason, however, for the belief that well-drilling increases rainfall seems to be quite clear. The opening of an oil field involves the moving of much heavy machinery by wagon or motor-truck. Rainy weather interferes with this process, and the traffic itself adds to the trouble by cutting up the roads. The muddy roads make a lasting impression on the minds of the oilmen, and thus the illusion is created that abnormally wet weather usually accompanies the opening of an oil field.

Similarly, the muddy roads that hampered military operations during the American Civil War fostered the idea that battles cause rain. The muddiness of the roads was just as common in days of peace but attracted far less attention.

SCIENCE SERVICE,
21st and B Sts.,
Washington, D. C.