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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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Authority on Meteorology.

LOOKING OUT FOR FIRE WEATHER

The chief fuel of forest fires is the "duff" or litter lying on the ground under the trees, and the U.S. Forest Service uses an instrument called the "duff hygrometer" for finding out the degree of moisture in this material. One day last spring a forest officer discovered by this means that the litter in a certain Western forest was dangerously dry. Immediately forty men were taken from ordinary duties in the forest and set to work looking out for possible fires or mobilized in readiness to fight the fires when they broke out.

This episode, related by H.T. Gisborne, of the Forest Service, is typical of the way in which foresters nowadays depend upon instruments rather than their personal impressions in determining the degree of fire hazard in the forest. In another recent case, according to the same authority, humidity was observed to be low both in the duff and the air, indicating more dangerous conditions than would have been apparent, without instrumental aid, to the experienced forester. An emergency was at once declared and many additional men were placed on duty as patrols and fire-fighters.

"In still another case," says Mr. Gisborne, "the 36-hour weather forecast received on a large fire that was being fought indicated a change in wind direction from southwest to north. Tactics of suppression were modified accordingly, one head of the fire, which had been unapproachable, was attacked, and an entire mountainside, which officials had despaired of saving, was saved from destruction."

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