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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LOW AURORAS?

Many cases have been reported in which displays of the aurora borealis appeared to be at low altitudes or even to extend down to the earth's surface. They have been described, for example, as having been seen to envelop the summits of hills or mountains, or with a mountainside as a background. In recent years such reports have been generally discredited by scientific authorities for two reasons. First, the aurora is an electrical discharge such as would be expected to occur only in the highly rarefied atmospheric gases found far above the earth. Second, the photographic measurements of auroras made in great numbers for many years past under the direction of Professor Stoermer, in Norway, have shown none lower than about 27 miles, while the usual altitude was between 60 and 70 miles.

Reports of low auroras continue, however, to appear. One of the most remarkable tales on the subject is published in a current Swedish scientific journal. The writer, named Hammer, who had charge of a meteorological station in northern Sweden many years ago, claims not only to have seen auroras resting on the ground but to have been enveloped in them. They resembled luminous fogs. In one case, he says, he was driving a sleigh along the border of a lake when he saw an aurora filling the road ahead of him. His horse halted at the sight, whereupon Mr. Hammer left the sleigh and led the animal through the glowing mist, emerging on the other side of it after a walk of a mile and a half.

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