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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

LANDSLIDE WINDS

The air displaced by a big avalanche or a big landslide constitutes a wind of terrific force, capable of producing almost as much destruction as the descending snow, earth or rocks. Because avalanches of snow are much commoner than landslides, works on meteorology that mention "avalanche winds" usually ignore the corresponding wind in front of the landslide.

A German account of the great landslide that buried part of the village of Elm in the Swiss canton of Glarus in 1881 tells how the terrific blast of wind swept away the houses before the solid material of the slide reached them. The roofs were lifted first and carried far, then the wooden portions of the houses were borne bodily through the air, "just as an autumn storm first drives off the leaves and then the dead branches from the trees." Eye-witnesses said that trees were blown about "like matches," that houses were "lifted through the air like feathers", and "thrown like cards against the hillside," and that "they bent, trembled and then broke up like little toys." Hay, furniture and the bodies of men were mixed with the house ruins in the air.

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