

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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RAINFALL CONTRASTS

The wettest place in Africa at which rainfall has been measured is Debundsha (or Debundja), lying at the southwest foot of the huge Cameroon (or Kamerun) Peak, which rises abruptly from the shore of the Bight of Biafra. The winds here are prevailing from seaward throughout the year and are cooled by expansion on account of being deflected upward by the mountain, so that there is excessive condensation of their moisture. Debundsha has an average rainfall of nearly 370 inches a year, and in one year -- 1922 -- received 572 inches. (The average at Washington, D. C., is 42 inches a year.) Farther up the slope the rainfall is undoubtedly greater and may surpass that of any other spot on earth.

The rainfall on the seaward side of the mountain is all the more interesting because on the east flank, at a height of some 3,000 feet, a pronounced dry season occurs each year, when water is so scarce that the natives refuse to sell it to travelers. "The scanty supply," says a recent description, "is brought by women from the nearest water hole, which may be many hours distant. Cattle depend solely upon the mountain dews. Pots and calabashes are placed to collect any drip from the thatched roof, and the water that accumulates in the folded bases of the banana leaves has to suffice, as the native has no idea of storage methods."

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