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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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NATURE'S SNOWBALLS

Some winter morning you may wake up to find your lawn covered with big snowballs, as if a whole regiment of brownies had been disporting themselves during the night. It is rather rare that the wind and the temperature are just right to produce what science calls "snow-rollers," and when this happens the resulting spectacle is generally very striking.

The rollers are cylindrical and more or less hollowed out at the ends, so that they have the general shape of that once familiar item of the feminine winter wardrobe, the muff. In size they may be as big as barrels, though they are generally much smaller. Each of these cylinders has been rolled by the wind and lies at the end of a long trough in the snow, marking the path along which the rolling has occurred. The trough is narrow at the end where the rolling began and gradually increases in width toward the final position of the roller.

The nucleus of a snow-roller is either a lump of snow scooped up by a gust or a projection from the snow surface which the wind topples over. As this is rolled along by the wind it will increase in size, provided the snow is of the right consistency. Loose, fluffy snow, only slightly damp, seems to be the most favorable for the production of snow-rollers.

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