

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
February 17, 1931

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed February 10, 1931

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ABNORMAL WEATHER

From any long record of weather observations at a particular place it is possible to compute what meteorologists call "normals" -- i.e., many-year averages -- of the principal weather elements, and vast collections of such data have been compiled for different parts of the world. Some of the more common normals are those of the daily, weekly, monthly and yearly mean temperature, the monthly and yearly rainfall, the monthly and yearly number of rainy days, and the monthly and yearly barometric pressure.

The degree of abnormality of a weather element during any specified period can be expressed by a figure, with a plus or minus sign before it, called the "departure from the normal," indicating whether the current value was higher or lower than normal, and how much. There is, however, no recognized method of combining the departures for the different elements so as to express numerically the degree of abnormality of the weather in general. Thus we cannot state definitely the extent to which a spell of weather at any place has been abnormal.

If we consider the weather to be absolutely normal only when the departures from the normals of all the principal weather elements are zero, then we must recognize that such weather is of rare occurrence in any given locality and something that never happens over any extensive area.

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