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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A TALKING FOG BEACON

According to the London Times, the world's first talking fog beacon has lately been installed at the Cumbrae lighthouse, in the Firth of Clyde. Its operation embodies the well-known plan of sending out a radio signal and an acoustic signal simultaneously, in order that a vessel off the beacon, by noting the interval between the times of arrival of these signals, may determine her distance from the beacon.

The apparatus in this case consists of an ordinary foghorn used in conjunction with a gramophone broadcasting by radio. The record played by the gramophone is simply the spoken name "Cumbrae," repeated every 70 seconds, and numbers counted in miles and cables (tenths of miles), up to five miles; followed by a silent interval until the name "Cumbrae" is again spoken, and the counting recommences.

The foghorn is blown at the same time the name of the lighthouse is broadcast. The acoustic signal travels at the relatively slow speed of sound in air, while the radio signals reach the ship with practically no delay, and the figure spoken at the moment the foghorn is heard on board gives the ship's distance from the beacon.

The talking beacon was devised by C. A. and D. A. Stevenson, of Edinburgh; members of the famous family of lighthouse builders to which Robert Louis Stevenson belonged.

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