

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"ST. ELMO" BY DAY

Though St. Elmo's fire is visible only at night, the brush discharge of electricity that produces this well-known attendant of thundery weather gives notice of its occurrence by a characteristic sound. On lofty, isolated mountains, where, at times, a great number of these discharges occur simultaneously, their combined noises may become quite loud. Writing of his experiences in the Rockies, G. H. Stone says:

"The peculiar buzzing and crackling sound, the standing of the hair on end, etc., are extremely common on the mountains of Colorado. The prospectors, miners and drivers of pack trains to the high mines -- above 11,000 feet -- live in the midst of these electrical phenomena and often find much amusement in observing their effect on the average 'tenderfoot,' especially when lady tourists, as not seldom happens, find their long hair slip from the fastenings and stand up like the fabled head-dress of the Furies. I have repeatedly heard the sounds at elevations between 6,000 and 7,000 feet, but they become much more noticeable at higher elevations, where they are sometimes terrific. On these mountains the manifestation of intense electrical phenomena is seldom seen except when there is hail or pellet snow or the most violent summer showers; and the latter usually have hail in some part of the storm."

Mr. Stone tells us that some of the old prospectors in the Colorado mountains cherish the notion that the nature of the mineral deposits in a mountain can be determined by observing the buzzing and other phenomena marking the passage of an electrical storm.

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