

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DOUBLE SUNSETS

Abnormalities of atmospheric refraction, generically described as "mirage," play a variety of queer pranks on human eyesight, so that we often see distant objects neither where nor as they really are. Here is one of the oddest cases on record, as described by the antarctic explorer Shackleton in the narrative of his expedition of 1914-17:

"Worsley was in the crow's-nest watching for signs of land to the westward, and he reported an interesting phenomenon. The sun set amid a glow of prismatic colors on a line of clouds just above the horizon. A minute later Worsley saw a golden glow, which expanded as he watched it, and presently the sun appeared again and rose a semi-diameter clear above the western horizon. He hailed Grean, who, from a position on the floe 90 feet below the crow's-nest also saw the reborn sun. A quarter of an hour later from the deck Worsley saw the sun set a second time. This strange phenomenon was due to mirage or refraction. We attributed it to an ice crack to the westward, where the bank of open water had heated a stratum of air."

A somewhat similar observation was reported not long ago to the British Meteorological Office by Second Officer R. M. Richardson, of the S.S. "Bendigo." On May 29, 1928, in latitude 31 degrees 38 minutes south, longitude 16 degrees 11 minutes east, a low bank of stratus cloud was on the horizon and the sun was seen setting behind it. In line with the sun the cloud thinned to a narrow point, below which a second sun was seen sinking below the horizon. As the lower sun disappeared the cloud bank resumed its original shape and then the upper sun set behind it.

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