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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed July 15, 1931

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

VERKHUYANSK

Verkhoyansk, in northern Siberia, is an insignificant village containing only some 60 houses and 300 inhabitants, but it is world-renowned on account of the low temperatures registered there in winter. Authorities differ as to the lowest reading ever observed. An absolute minimum of 94 below zero has been given in official Russian publications, but according to a statement from the headquarters of the Russian meteorological service some years ago, the correct value is 90 below, and this has generally been accepted as a "world record." As the climate of the locality is typically continental, the summers are warm. On one occasion the temperature went up to 94 above zero.

Vladimir Zenzinov, who lived at Verkhoyansk for some time before the war as a political exile, says in his recent book, "The Road to Oblivion," that the inhabitants feared the summer more than the winter. "It is," he states, "the kingdom of mosquitoes. They breed here in veritable clouds and show no mercy to man, horse, deer or even the bear. Cases have been known of mosquitoes biting to death a cow or a bull. Bears have been encountered in the taiga covered with mosquitoes so completely that the beasts roared from pain and smote themselves with their paws. During the incredibly humid weeks the fireplaces in Verkhoyansk are kept going as a protection against the swarm of gnats. The cabins are filled with smoke. The Yakuts set the forests on fire, and the air becomes insupportable. It is inevitable that Verkhoyansk should have been regarded as one of the worst places of exile. A number of people committed suicide here; others died from the unendurable conditions."

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