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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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COOL READING FOR THE DOG DAYS

"I arrived at Verkhoyansk," says Vladimir Zenzinov, in his book "The Road to Oblivion," "at the coldest time of the year, just at the season when the 'pole of cold' can be studied best. I recorded on the alcohol thermometer the temperature of 95.4 degrees below zero." Perhaps he did; but this reading is 5 degrees lower than the lowest ever registered by the official weather station at this uncomfortable spot in Siberia, and so, again, perhaps he didn't. Anyhow --

"One of the strangest phenomena was the rumbling of the earth in the burning cold. The ground seemed to crack underneath, with a sound that resembled artillery blasts. The dull roars reverberated in the still air with echoes that jammed one's heart. I had heard of this weird Arctic thundering, but it nevertheless filled me with anxiety. In the dark and ice-bound waste, the crackling noise made one think of fissures in the earth's surface, of dead eternities swallowing one forever....

"In very severe cold the air one exhales issues forth not in the form of steam but in something resembling dew, and to the accompaniment of a feeble crackling sound in the air -- the result of a rapid condensation of the warm breath. I was always able to determine without a thermometer when the temperature was below 60 degrees. I would blow into the air a thin stream of my breath, and when I heard that faint rustle I knew it was 60"....

Now don't you feel cooler?

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