

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SOUNDING-BALLOON RECOVERIES

One way of measuring atmospheric conditions aloft is to send up a small free balloon, to which is attached a light set of self-registering instruments -- called a meteorograph -- and a printed card offering the finder a reward for packing and shipping the instruments and their records to a specified destination. The late Prof. Rotch, in his book "Sounding the Ocean of Air," tells us that when such balloons were first employed in France they were called "ballons perdus," or "lost balloons," but when it was found that most of them were eventually recovered this name no longer seemed appropriate and they were given their present name of "ballons-sondes," or "sounding-balloons."

The large percentage of records recovered, even in sparsely settled countries, is surprising. Of 72 balloons sent up by a Franco-Swedish expedition in Lapland, 41 were eventually returned, with their instruments. One of these fell into a lake and was found after three years. An even more remarkable case has just been reported by the U. S. Weather Bureau. A sounding-balloon was sent up at Los Angeles December 31, 1927. The remains of the balloon and the meteorograph, with a legible record, were found on April 12, 1931, about 125 miles from the place of ascent. The record showed that the balloon had attained an altitude of nearly 9 miles during its flight and had registered 101 degrees below zero Fahrenheit at the highest point reached.

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