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AUSTRALIAN DUST STORMS

Some of the most remarkable dust storms that have afflicted Australia occurred in the year 1902 as a result of a severe drought. Of conditions that year in New South Wales, Andrew Noble wrote:

"The soil, made loose and friable by the prolonged absence of rain, no longer able to withstand the wind, was swirled up and carried across country. In many cases it was torn up to a depth of one foot, or down to solid clay. On a station in the Wileaunia district 100,000 acres was left as bare as a floor, upon which a heavy rain that followed had no effect. In one case 12 feet of sand was deposited in a bank in three months. Wherever a little resistance offered, the sand accumulated and eventually formed a dune. Wire-netted rabbit-proof fences were buried in this way, and even a second story to the fence shared a similar fate. A 7-foot stockyard fence was so completely submerged within eighteen months of erection that the owner drove over it in his buggy."

The greatest dust storm of all was that of November 11-13, which involved nearly the whole of Australia and the surrounding ocean as far away as New Zealand. At Melbourne, according to another account, "the dust was at times suffocatingly dense and the upper air was so loaded with it that the sun was rarely visible. In the country the effects were much more marked. At many inland towns the darkness produced almost equaled that of the blackest night, and in the houses nothing could be done without lamps or other means of lighting. Added to this were some phenomena of an even more terrifying character. At Boort and in some parts of the Riverina the storm was accompanied by a sort of globular lightning, and 'fireballs' were seen falling on the fields and roads."

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