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November 12, 1931

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed November 5, 1931

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"WEATHER HOPS"

Airplane flights made for the purpose of collecting meteorological information aloft, known in fliers' slang as "weather hops," have lately become part of the daily routine of the Weather Bureau at four places in the United States; viz., Dallas, Omaha, Chicago and Cleveland. These flights take the place of the daily kite observations formerly made at certain other points.

Each flight starts at about 5 a.m., eastern standard time, and lasts, on an average, an hour and a half. The planes carry instruments for making automatic records of temperature, relative humidity and barometric pressure, and the ascent is made at a rate of not more than 300 to 500 feet a minute, as a more rapid rise would involve a certain amount of "lag" in the action of the instruments. The record made during descent is not used, so this part of the flight is accomplished as quickly as possible.

The time taken to complete a flight is only about half that required for a kite flight, and thus the information obtained by the new method is placed at the disposal of weather forecasters much more promptly than was that formerly obtained by kites. The planes have, moreover, reached altitudes averaging about double those attained by kites. Another advantage is that, besides bringing back his autographic record, the pilot notes the height of the cloud base, the occurrence of rain and snow at high levels, and other matters of interest to forecasters, of which the kite records gave no indication.

The flights are made by commercial pilots under contract with the Weather Bureau. The results are promptly telegraphed to the main forecasting centers of the Bureau at Washington, Chicago, Denver and New Orleans, where they arrive in time to aid in making the regular morning forecasts and are telegraphed thence to other weather stations.

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