

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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Authority on Meteorology.

MUD FLOODS

Ivan E. Houk, who has made a special study for some years of the cloudbursts and cloudburst floods of the western United States, gives an account in a recent article of the extraordinary streams of mud that often flow from canyons in connection with these events. These mud flows have ruined a good deal of property and have occasionally caused loss of life.

"Canyon floods of mud," says Mr. Houk, "usually cause a roaring noise, which can be heard several miles in advance of the flood wave. It is due to the uprooting, breaking and rolling along of large trees, the dislodging, grinding and crashing of huge boulders and the forming and breaking of debris dams along the path of the flood. Sometimes the floods of mud reach the mouth of the canyon in a series of waves only a few minutes apart; the first wave containing the coarsest and the greatest amount of debris and the succeeding waves gradually becoming thinner and thinner until finally the moving mass consists of ordinary flood water.

"As soon as the flood waves reach the plains they spread out in fan-shaped areas, depositing their loads of material in layers of gradually decreasing thickness. Sometimes the total deposits left by a single flood are as much as 20 feet deep and cover areas extending as far as 20 miles from the mouth of the canyon.

"Although floods of mud are comparatively rare as regards a particular mountain canyon, they are frequent in the country as a whole. Hardly a week passes during the summer months when the newspapers in some part of the United States fail to tell about a flood of mud blocking a country highway, filling a city street, . . . covering a mountain cabin, destroying a ranch or killing unfortunate people who were caught unawares and were unable to escape."

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