

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

AN UNUSUAL "FULGURITE"

In the early morning of April 15, 1931, according to press reports, a meteorite cut a power line near Herman, Nebraska. Subsequently the meteorite was reported to have been found in the ground under the line. The affair was investigated by Dr. C.C. Wylie, a well-known astronomer, who reports to the following effect:

A man named Christensen stated that, during a severe thunderstorm, he saw a ball of fire fall from the sky, and that its fall was followed by flames apparently leaping higher than the power line. On going to the spot later, he found a peculiar light stony formation beneath the break in the line. It was about 14 inches long, 4 inches thick, 5 1/2 pounds in weight, and was quite hot when found. He and others naturally assumed that this had fallen from the heavens and cut the wire, which was down.

What apparently happened, according to Dr. Wylie, was that the line was not broken by a meteorite but by the direct or indirect effects of a stroke of lightning. The leaping flames were probably a brilliant arc between two wires. One of the wires was probably melted through and dropped, and then the high-voltage current entering the ground produced the mass that was mistaken for a meteorite. This mass was, in other words, identical in character with a fulgurite, or lightning-tube, such as a stroke of lightning sometimes produces in sandy soil, but in this case it was produced by an artificial discharge instead of a natural one.

Incidentally, if Christensen's eyes did not deceive him, the line was broken by that mysterious variety of nature's fireworks, ball lightning.

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