A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
February 29, 1932

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed February 20,1932

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

THE NAME "CHINOOK"

The name "chinook" is now most commonly applied to a dry wind, warm for the season, that blows down the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains over the adjacent plains, in the United States and Canada. It is identical in character with the Swiss foehn. In winter this wind causes snow to disappear with remarkable rapidity, and hence it is nicknamed the "snow-eater." The same name is, however, applied to other winds of western North America, including a warm, moist southwesterly wind blowing from the Pacific Ocean to the coastal region of Washington and Oregon; sometimes distinguished as the "wet chinook."

There has been much controversy over the history of the name. Much attention has been devoted to this subject by J. Neilson Barry, secretary of the Trail Seekers' Council, of Oregon, whose investigations indicate that the name was given first of all neither to the dry wind east of the Rockies nor to the "wet chinook" of the coast, but to a dry northwesterly wind experienced in summer at Astoria, Oregon. This wind came from the direction of the Chinook Indian villages on the opposite shore of the Columbia River, between Point Ellice and Cape Disappointment, and according to Mr. Barry, was first called "the Chinook wind," as a joke,about 1840 by a Mr. Birnie, who was in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Fort George, on the present site of Astoria. Birnie was a well-known character in the Northwest for many years, which probably explains why his nickname for the wind became popular and eventually spread far beyond its place of origin, with various applications.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

SCIENCE SERVICE
21st and Constitution Ave.
Washington, D.C.