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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AN INTERMITTENT CLOUDBURST FLOOD

A cloudburst flood of mud and water that issued from a California canyon in successive waves, each extending farther than the preceding one, is described by an eye-witness, J.S. Douglas. Some fifteen minutes before the first discharge made its appearance its dull and heavy roar could be heard. As it issued from the narrow mouth of the canyon it was accompanied by a cloud of dust, due to the breaking up of huge masses of dry soil torn from projecting points of land along its route.

It spread to a width of probably 200 yards and after descending about half a mile came to a full stop, only to be succeeded in a few moments by another wave larger and swifter than the first, on which great rocks weighing several tons were dancing like corks. This wave extended half a mile beyond the first, and then it, also, came to a stop. Several more waves came down at intervals of some minutes, each traveling faster and farther than the preceding one and each getting thinner, until the discharge was all water instead of mud.

The explanation of these excessive discharges is found in the formation of a series of temporary dams of mud and débris at the mouth of the canyon, the breaking of each dam being followed by a swift rush of the liberated torrent.

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