

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed April 28, 1932

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RUNAWAY KITES

Varied are the jobs of the official weatherman. Chasing runaway kites is one of them, though it is rarer now than formerly, as meteorological kite-flying has been, to a great extent, replaced by the more expeditious and efficient process of the "weather hop," performed by an aviator. Recently, however, a string of kites broke away during a flight at Ellendale, North Dakota, where the Weather Bureau still maintains a kite station. After traveling four miles they were halted momentarily when the end of the kite-wire caught on a telephone line, but before the pursuing weathermen could recover them they tore away again. Five miles farther on the wire caught on a barbed-wire fence. When the pursuers were within a hundred yards of the spot the kites resumed their travels, taking a fence post along with them. This burden proved too heavy for a prolonged trip, and at the end of a mile the wire and post caught on a mail-box. It took a whole day to get the kites back to the station over snow-blocked roads.

In March, 1923, a string of six kites that broke away from the Ellendale station traveled about 275 miles, finally landing in a cedar swamp in northeastern Minnesota. The kites were found by a woodsman more than a year later. Previous to this there was a breakaway at the Groesbeck, Texas, kite station and the kites traveled about the same distance, landing in southern Arkansas.

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