

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed May 7, 1932.

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TORNADO WINDS

The strength of the wind in the heart of a tornado has never been directly measured. It can be very roughly estimated from its effects in moving heavy objects and also on the basis of the fall in barometric pressure attending the passage of the tornado vortex. This fall in pressure appears to amount to as much as a tenth of an atmosphere in some cases, as indicated by the collapse of walls under the outward thrust of the air, at ordinary atmospheric pressure, inside a building. From such evidence it seems likely that the air in the vortex may sometimes revolve as fast as 500 miles an hour. By way of comparison it may be stated that the winds in a tropical hurricane seldom blow faster than 100 miles an hour, and that a wind of 500 miles an hour is not five times, but twenty-five times, as strong as one of 100 miles an hour.

The tornado blast has been known to pick up a cart weighing 600 pounds, tear it to pieces in the air, and deposit the tire of one wheel more than a thousand yards away. Dead sheep have been found shorn of their wool to the bare skin by the force of the wind, while fowls are plucked of their feathers as if by hand. Loaded railway cars and locomotives have been blown from the track; iron bridges have been moved from their foundations. Straws have been driven through boards, laths through trees and small sticks of timber through an iron plate.

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