

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
July 21, 1932

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed July 14, 1932

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THE FORMS OF LIGHTNING

The "heat lightning" that plays along the horizon on summer evenings is merely the reflection of thunderstorms too far distant to be audible. Whether silent glow-like discharges of lightning actually occur in the sky in some cases, or whether, on the contrary, all apparent "sheet lightning" is the reflection of ordinary linear or "streak" lightning is an unsettled question.

"Beaded lightning" and "rocket lightning" are both so rare that whenever either of them is observed it is generally reported at length in the scientific journals. The former resembles a string of glowing beads, while the latter is a form of streak lightning that shoots up into the air about the apparent speed of a skyrocket.

One of the most spectacular forms of lightning (if it can be so called) occurs in the Andes and has occasionally been reported from other mountainous regions. At times the mountains seem to act as gigantic lightning rods, giving rise to more or less continuous diffuse discharges between themselves and the clouds. A few years ago American meteorologists thought they had found an example of this striking phenomenon in North Carolina, but the once mysterious "Brown Mountain lights" of that state have been proved to be merely the beams of a distant locomotive and automobile headlights, or due to other human agencies.

"Ball lightning" is a fact, but its real nature is still a mystery.

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