

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A FAMOUS DRY FOG

A "dry fog" consists of smoke or dust rather than water and in its lighter forms is generally described as "haze." The most remarkable dry fog recorded in history is the one that prevailed in both Europe and North America during the summer of 1783. One of the many contemporary descriptions of it is found in Gilbert White's "Natural History of Selborne," where we read:

"The summer of 1783 was an amazing and portentous one and full of horrible phenomena, for, besides the alarming meteors and tremendous thunderstorms that af-frightened and distressed the different counties of this kingdom, the peculiar haze, and of smoky fog, that prevailed for many weeks in this island in every part of Europe, and even beyond its limits, was a most extraordinary appearance, unlike anything known with the memory of man. The sun, at noon, looked as blank as a clouded moon and shed a rust-colored ferruginous light on the ground and floors of rooms."

One of Benjamin Franklin's scientific disquisitions relates to the same event. He says: "During several of the summer months of the year 1783, when the effects of the sun's rays to heat the earth in these northern regions should have been greatest, there existed a constant fog all over Europe and a great part of North America. This fog was of a permanent nature; it was dry, and the rays of the sun seemed to have little effect toward dissipating it, as they easily do a moist fog arising from water." Franklin correctly surmised that the fog of 1783 consisted of dust from the great volcanic eruptions of that year, and meteorologists today know of many other cases in which the atmosphere has been obscured, though to a less striking degree, by widespread and persistent veils of volcanic dust.

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