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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE STRONGEST WINDS

With the possible exception of the blasts driven in front of some great avalanches and landslides, the winds of North American tornadoes surpass all others in strength, but they have never been measured. Plausible estimates, based on certain physical characteristics of their vortices and on their observed effects in moving heavy objects, run to something like 500 miles an hour for the worst of these storms.

The strongest wind ever measured instrumentally near the earth's surface blew at the summit of Mount Washington, New Hampshire, January 11, 1878, when an anemometer held out of the window of the Signal Service station during a terrific gale registered 186 miles an hour. Certain corrections appropriate to the instrument employed would reduce this reading to about 140 miles an hour. It appears, however, that the anemometer was not exposed to the full force of the gale, so that the actual strength of the wind may have been about the same as that indicated.

It so happens that the same wind velocity - 186 miles an hour - is the highest ever measured in the upper air with a pilot-balloon. This record was obtained about 4 1/2 miles over Lansing, Michigan, on December 17, 1919.

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