

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
February 9, 1933

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed February 2, 1933

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

ANDES LIGHTS

In the rarefied air of great altitudes the natural brush discharges of electricity known as St. Elmo's fire attain a greater size than elsewhere. Hence, in the lack of a better explanation, science has tentatively classified as a variety of this phenomenon the marvelous glows and rays of light that frequently crown the summits of the Andes, as seen mainly from the western coast and the adjacent ocean, and are now usually described as "Andes lightning," or "Andes lights." During the warmer season of the year it is not uncommon to see the mountaintops glowing continuously through the night, while occasionally great beams, like those of a gigantic searchlight, shoot up into the sky. The natives have long regarded these lights as the reflection of glowing lava in the craters of volcanoes, but there seems to be no doubt that they are electric discharges of some sort. Apparently the lofty mountains serve as great lightning rods, from which currents of electricity stream off into the air.

"Andes lights" have been reported from the Alps, and at one time this weird phenomenon was supposed to occur in the mountains of North Carolina. Thanks, however, to the investigations of the United States Geological Survey, we now know that the so-called "Brown Mountain lights" of that state are nothing more mysterious than the headlights of distant locomotives and automobiles.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

SCIENCE SERVICE
21st and Constitution Ave.
Washington, D.C.