

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed February 13, 1933

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BURIED IN SNOW

Loose snow contains an abundance of air and hence it is not remarkable that human beings and lower animals survive for long periods of time when buried in snow-drifts. Sheep have been dug out alive after being thus buried for weeks and a case is recorded of a woman in England who survived under the snow for fourteen days. This explains why mountaineers buried under avalanches are often rescued long after being overwhelmed and deeply buried. The process of rescue, as practiced in the Alps, is described as follows in a recent issue of the Illustrated London News:

"The equipment of a rescue-party is practically standardized, and includes, in particular, 'avalanche-sounders,' shovels, ropes, marking-pegs, rescue-sledges, bandages, medicaments, torches, and storm-lanterns. The first thing to do is to 'sound' the avalanche. The great mass of snow is probed with iron staves ('avalanche-sounders') some twelve or sixteen feet long, until ground is touched. Great care is called for, lest injury be done to buried victims. Each spot at which ground is not reached is marked; and a hole is dug until the ground can be felt with a stave. If a buried victim is touched, the rescuers are in a position to dig him out. Obviously, it is often very difficult to tell by feel the difference between a body and a mass of snow pressed hard at a depth of twelve or sixteen feet. Once a victim has been located, the work of rescue goes on day and night without interruption; for in frequent cases a victim has been found alive after two days. The next tasks rest with the doctor or the ambulance men; the respiratory organs have to be freed; artificial respiration has to be administered; and the limbs must be rubbed with snow. Finally, liquid stimulants can be administered when the rescued man can breathe by himself, and when there is no longer any danger of his choking."

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