

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"MADMEN" ON MOUNT WASHINGTON

The enterprise of the little party of meteorologists now marooned by snow and ice at the summit of Mount Washington, New Hampshire, where they are carrying out a program of observations as a part of the International Polar Year project, has called forth much admiring comment but not the banter and ridicule that fell to the lot of their predecessors of the winter of 1870-71, when the mountaintop was first occupied for scientific purposes. To one of the earliest regular weather reports telegraphed from the summit a statement was added that a snowflake of previously undescribed form had been observed; whereupon a newspaper remarked:

"A party of fossilized scientific maniacs are wintering out on the top of Mount Washington, and a gaping world stands below in anticipation of great discoveries. We palpitate as we record the first sensation which they have descended to let loose. It is that they have discovered a new and hitherto unknown species of - snowflake! What effect this tremendous discovery will have on the subsequent development of the resources of the country time alone can determine."

One newspaper published a burlesque journal of the expedition, beginning with the statement that "it was the original design to ascend the mountain early in November, but it was finally thought fit to defer the ascent until the mountain should be become inaccessible. This occurred on the 25th. On the next day, the roads being entirely impassable, the gentlemen composing the expedition proceeded to make the ascent." Another remarkable discovery attributed to the expedition was that "sleds ran more rapidly downhill than in the contrary direction," which was accounted for "upon the theory of tittlebats." A member of the party was said to have been lost on the mountain. "When he was finally discovered, he was covered with a coating of ice three inches in thickness and of great purity. With a view to making further experiments upon him, he was left in an exposed position until morning, when he was unfortunately found to be insensible. Boiling water after a time proved efficacious in reviving him." Another member is alleged to have been caught in a violent blast of wind and instantly flattened out against the side of the observatory. "He was spread out over an area of eighteen square feet," but was subsequently scraped off with knives and survived.

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