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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A GOBI DESERT SANDSTORM

In the narrative of his journey of a few years ago across the Gobi Desert, Sven Hedin records the following adventure with a sandstorm:

"Larson came running to my yurt, and shouted: 'Just come out quick and look westward. There the sandstorm is coming sweeping towards us like a dark wall.' It was indeed a thrilling, nay, almost a weird sight. The sky was completely darkened with myriads of flying grains of sand and particles of dust. Luckily I had already taken the bearings of the mountains in the north the previous afternoon; for today they were as if wiped out of existence and could not be seen at all. Mento came rushing in to me, in order to fasten a rope in the interior of my yurt from the chimney to the floor, which was then secured outside to a few heavy boxes. If it had flown away, we should perhaps never have got it again. To say nothing at all of my personal property, which, of course, would then have danced away, and probably first made a halt in the forest of Möruin-gol. To move forward in the face of such a storm is almost impossible. One must press forward as if through water. And if one goes with the storm, one must lean backwards and almost at an angle of 30 degrees against the pressing wind. But although men can hold their own against such a storm, for the camels it is well-nigh killing. The animals themselves, as also their projecting loads, form a powerful target for the wind, and their task becomes twice as great as it ordinarily is. A series of such stormy days as this can lay a caravan low."

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