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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 20, 1933

THE MOST FAMOUS ALPINE WIND

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The most famous wind of the Alps is the foehn; the name of which is a corruption of the Latin "favonius," anciently applied to the west wind in Italy, though the foehn in most parts of the Alps blows from the south or nearly so. It is hot in summer, mild in winter and excessively dry; characteristics that it owes to the fact that it loses much moisture in ascending a mountain slope and is then heated and further dried by compression in blowing down the opposite slope. Before this process was understood some authorities attempted to explain its warmth and dryness by assuming that it came all the way from the Sahara Desert.

Disastrous "foehn fires" sometimes occur, when woodwork becomes extremely dry and inflammable under the influence of this desiccating wind. In certain Alpine valleys the authorities prohibit the lighting of stoves, or even of cigarettes, while the foehn is blowing; a burdensome restriction when, as sometimes happens, the wind lasts several days.

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