

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
January 1, 1934

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 22, 1933

ANTARCTIC ICE

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

Descriptions of the endless fields of ice and snow over which Admiral Byrd and Lincoln Ellsworth are planning to fly remind us of the fact that we are still living in an ice age; the latest of several through which the earth has passed. When the present one was at its height, in the Pleistocene, some 12,000,000 square miles of the earth's surface lay under a blanket of ice, of which about one-half still remains unmelted. The Antarctic ice sheet has an area of about 5,000,000 square miles.

This largest remnant of the Quaternary ice age is of unknown depth. Wright and Priestley, the glaciologists of Scott's expedition, estimate that its average thickness is not more than 2,000 feet. On the other hand, Prof. Wilhelm Meinardus, a veteran student of polar problems, believes that the land of Antarctica is only about as high as the nearest parts of Africa, South America and Australia, averaging about 2,000 feet, and that all of the great Antarctic plateau above that level is ice. The altitude of the plateau is supposed to range from 6,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level. On this basis he computes for the ice sheet a volume of 26,000,000,000,000 cubic yards; enough ice to cover all Europe to a depth of over 6,500 feet, or to blanket the whole earth under a layer between 120 and 130 feet.

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