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February 1, 1934

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed January 25, 1934

BRITISH RAIN OBSERVERS

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

Partly, perhaps, because keeping rainfall records is a hobby with many Britishers, the British Isles have long maintained a system of rainfall observing that is a model for the rest of the world. The British Rainfall Organization, founded as a private enterprise by G.J. Symons, was taken over by the government in 1919 and became a section of the Meteorological Office. For several years it has numbered well over 5,000 observers.

A few of these observers are full-time or part-time paid employees of the Meteorological Office, who observe other elements of weather besides rainfall, and there are also a few cases in which a small fee is paid to an observer for measuring rain in localities where a volunteer observer is not available, but the great bulk of the observations are made without expense to the government. About 1,000 of the rainfall stations are maintained by local authorities or companies concerned with water supply or water-power undertakings. There remain about 4,000 individuals or unofficial bodies that measure rain for the organization, not only without pay but with instruments purchased by themselves.

The distribution of the stations is quite uneven. The number of stations per 100 square miles is as high as 28 in Middlesex but is under 1 in parts of Scotland and Ireland. There are more than 80 stations equipped with recording gauges, which register the rate of rainfall. An annual publication called British Rainfall records the data gathered by the whole organization.

There are several local organizations of rainfall observers in the British Isles independent of this national one.

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21st and Constitution Ave.
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