

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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FULGURITES

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Authority on Meteorology.

The most recent reported finds of fulgurites, or lightning-tubes, were those of H. St. John Philby at three places in the great southern desert of Arabia. Their nature was not recognized by the explorer, but was revealed when they were examined by Dr. T.J. Spencer at the British Museum, who describes them in an appendix to Philby's last book, "The Empty Quarter." Fulgurites consist of silica-glass and are produced in sand by the heat of a lightning stroke.

"The inside of such tubes," says Dr. Spencer, "is always smooth and glazed, and the outside is rough, with adhering grains of partly fused sand. The walls are usually very thin and friable and specimens can be collected only as fragments. Though roughly cylindrical, the tubes taper away downwards and are sometimes branched. When flattened they often have thin flanges of fused material projecting from the sides of the tube; these have been called 'winged fulgurites."

"The most complete specimen in the mineral collection of the British Museum is a portion three feet in length of a tube 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter, from Maldonado, Uruguay; and the longest, but made up of pieced fragments, is nearly 16 feet in length, from near Dresden. A fulgurite in the sand-dunes at Drigg, on the coast of Cumberland, was traced for 30 feet without marking the end. Specimens are very rarely found and are not common in collections."

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