

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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MOUNTAIN LIGHTNING

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Nowhere else do the electrical discharges of thunderstorms assume so intense and terrifying a character as on the summit of high mountains. The observatory, built by the astronomer Janssen, that once stood on the summit of Mont Blanc was repeatedly struck by lightning, though it bore numerous lightning rods, connected by cables with some rocks a few hundred feet distant. The building was of wood and was built on the snow. The effects of lightning here were appalling. The metal tableware was frequently melted or perforated; the bolts and nuts in the walls were melted; the woodwork was charred; the metal cap of the large telescope was pierced with holes.

In 1903 a guide, one Felix Bozon, witnessed a brilliant electrical discharge in the form of ribbons of fire, which for two hours and a half continued to play across the interior of the building, proceeding from one of the cables connected with the lightning rods. In 1902 a ball of fire as large as a pigeon's egg was seen to move slowly across the room, then retreat for a distance and explode, giving a violent shock to the occupants. In 1907 a series of lightning strokes occurred one evening at nearly regular intervals of a few minutes. Each stroke produced a deafening noise and was attended by sparks like fiery serpents, which shot through the observatory in all directions. This process continued nearly an hour.

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