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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed January 15, 1935

ALASKAN COLD WEATHER

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The interior of Alaska is a land of extreme temperatures. An official reading of 100 above zero in the shade is recorded from Fort Yukon, and there are tales of even hotter summer weather in the territory. In winter the cold is often intense and lasting. H.L. Frost, of the U.S. Weather Bureau, writes on this subject:

There are few inhabited regions of the world where such prolonged periods of extreme cold are recorded. From old settlers one often hears stories of isolated camps where the thermometer falls below -80 and remains below -70 for days. However much one may doubt the accuracy of such statements, this extreme cold is not at all impossible. The records from a network of cooperative stations at the various mining camps throughout the country would furnish very interesting statistics and might reveal some unusually cold locality similar to the famous region at Verkhoyansk, Siberia. Old inhabitants are of the opinion that the settlement of Birches, below Tanana on the Yukon River, is the coldest place in Alaska. Whether this is due to extremely low temperatures or to a combination of cold weather and high winds remains to be determined. The lowest temperature accepted as official for any Alaskan station is -76 at Tanana in January 1886, while the lowest for the entire region is -80 recorded at old Fort Reliance near Dawson, Yukon Territory. In February 1932 a privately owned thermometer at Alatna, near Allakaket registered -82, but this thermometer was destroyed by fire before it could be secured for testing at low temperatures."

The most famous low-temperature reading of all in Alaska is that of Archdeacon Stuck's minimum thermometer, found at an altitude of 15,000 feet on Mount McKinley after lying there 19 years. The index was down in the bulb, indicating a temperature lower than 100 below zero some time during the period of exposure. Was the index shaken down? Mr. Frost says: "It is stated that the thermometer was resting in a slightly inclined position with the bulb end uppermost." The instrument was a reliable one--but we shall never know the truth about that low temperature.

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