

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed January 16, 1935

A NOISY ICE STORM

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Authority on Meteorology

Ice storms often make a din like that of a battlefield through the snapping and rending of tree branches and twigs under their load of ice and through the fall of icy fragments. One that produced sounds of another kind is described by Dr. W. J. Humphreys in the current Monthly Weather Review. It happened last February in the mountains of West Virginia. First there was heavy snow, which changed to rain. This was followed by a freeze, which covered the snow with a sheet of ice 1 to 2 inches thick, a disastrous situation for stockmen. Hundreds of sheep perished beneath it and neither cattle nor horses could cross it, even a short distance for feed or water, since at every step or attempted step the jagged edges of the broken crust cut their legs.

"Then," we are told, "as the landscape lay bleak and imprisoned came mysterious sounds -- muffled rumbles as of distant thunder or far-off blasting, owing, as finally found, to the sudden ripping of long rifts in the dense, thick glaze. Some of these were 2 inches wide, half a mile, or more, in length and quite straight.

"Presumably it was a decrease in the temperature of the ice crust that caused it to become so strained that it finally broke; and a crack once started in this crust doubtless traveled with the high speed of the transverse elastic wave, producing as it went violent tremors and thereby a loud sound, muffled by the snow beneath, along its entire course. At any rate, owing to the damage done by this snow, the annoyance it caused, and the strange sounds it produced, the date of its occurrence is now one of the fixed points in the local chronology."

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