

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed Feb. 20, 1935

A RUMBLING CLOUD

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Authority on Meteorology

A good-sized book might be written about all the strange sounds, many of them unexplained, that haunt the air at various places and times. One of these acoustic oddities was reported by the physicist, Prof. John Zeleny, of Yale University, who observed it on the shore of Cache Lake in Algonquin Park, Ontario, early one morning in July, 1931. The sky was completely overcast.

"My attention," he writes, "was attracted by a rumbling sound coming from the west, such as heralds the approach of a heavy thunderstorm. As I watched, a very long, narrow, tenuous cloud, resembling a squall cloud, appeared above the trees on the opposite shore, moving at right angles to its length. The continuous rumbling noise, now grown remarkably loud, seemed to come unmistakably from this cloud, whose cross-sectional diameter was only about 200 feet. The cloud passed overhead eastward and was not followed by the expected rainstorm.

"It seems almost incredible that so much sound could have come from the agitated air alone, yet this seems to be the only plausible explanation of its origin. I steadfastly looked for small lightning flashes in the cloud and saw none, although they would have had to come in rapid succession to produce the persistent sound that was heard. The noise could not have come from the rattle of hail, because the cross-section of the cloud was too small to give time for hail formation; and in any case no hail fell."

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