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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed April 8, 1935

IN TORRID DANAKIL

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman  
Authority on Meteorology

The highest temperature ever registered, so far as known, at a regular meteorological station was 136 degrees Fahrenheit; this reading having been made at Azizia, in Tripolitania, in 1922. When, therefore, L. M. Nesbitt, who was awarded the Murchison Grant of the Royal Geographical Society for his remarkable journey through Danakil, in northeastern Abyssinia, tells us in the account of his journey published in the journal of that society, and more recently in a book called "Hell-Hole of Creation," of encountering hotter weather than this day after day, we are naturally curious to know something about the thermometer he used and how he used it. We should like to know whether the instrument was tested in the laboratory after the journey was over and found to be accurate. On all these subjects Mr. Nesbitt has nothing whatever to say.

The explorer refers to the region as one in which "temperatures reach 170 degrees Fahrenheit," and he speaks once of loading his caravan "in a temperature of nearly 170 degrees." How were these temperatures measured? If the thermometer was exposed to the sun, its readings give no clue to the temperature of the air in either sun or shade. Occasionally the author is more specific. Twice he gives the temperature as 158 in the shade. Even so, we cannot be sure that this was a true air temperature, measured with a properly shaded and ventilated accurate instrument.

That the bare surface of the ground in Danakil gets as hot in the sun as 170 is very probable, for even higher ground temperatures have been measured elsewhere. The air within a few inches of the ground may, in calm weather, get almost equally hot. If, however, such a temperature prevails a few feet above the ground, it is pretty certain that no human being exposed to it for hours together would live to tell the tale.

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