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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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HOT WEATHER "RECORDS"

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Within the past 25 years three extremely high thermometer readings have been reported from weather stations in different parts of the world; each supposedly taken from a shaded and otherwise suitably exposed maximum thermometer; i.e., an instrument that registers the highest temperature that occurs between settings. The figures (in Fahrenheit degrees) are 133 at In-Salah, in the heart of the Algerian Sahara; 134 in Death Valley, California; and 136 at Azizia, 25 miles south of the city of Tripoli, in northern Africa.

Both the African readings have been questioned. The one at Azizia was from 15 to 20 degrees higher than the maxima recorded on the same day at surrounding places. The In-Salah reading has been rejected by the official meteorological service of Algeria. The Death Valley reading is believed to be trustworthy.

Suppose, however, we knew all three readings to be accurate. How much importance should we attach to the fact that Azizia beat Death Valley's "record" by 2 degrees and that both places surpassed In-Salah? None whatever! A good thermometer, properly exposed, registers the temperature of the air in contact with it, but within a radius of a mile or two both higher and lower temperatures are pretty sure to prevail at the same time. Exact figures in this connection are of little interest, but the "order of magnitude" is of very considerable interest. That air temperatures above 130 in the shade sometimes occur in subtropical deserts is a fact worth knowing.

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