

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ANCIENT DUST STORMS

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The dust storms that have recently darkened American skies were mild affairs compared with those that prevailed in both the New World and the Old in the declining state of the last glacial period, when the vast glaciers that had invaded the temperate zone were gradually withdrawing to higher latitudes. The air over the ice was very cold, and in summer its temperature contrasted strongly with that of the air over the ice-free lands farther south. Such contrasts tend to produce strong winds. Hurricane blasts, sweeping down from the glaciers, picked up enormous quantities of the soil left bare by the retreating ice and carried it to great distances. Eventually this dust settled down to form the deep beds of fine powdery soil called "loess," a broad band of which extends around the globe. This dust-soil, now covering thousands of square miles in the Mississippi and Missouri valleys, is still easily blown about when drought kills off the surface vegetation, and it has been the chief contributor to some of the huge dust clouds that have recently been so prevalent on our continent.

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