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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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RAINBOWS AND HALOS

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Many things that the non-scientific observer is likely to describe as "rainbows" belong to groups of optical phenomena otherwise classified by science; especially to the large family of halos, some varieties of which display rainbow colors. A fundamental distinction between rainbows and halos is that the former are always produced by drops of water and the latter by crystals of ice floating in the air. Confusion can be avoided by remembering that the rainbow is always diametrically opposite the sun (or moon, if it is a lunar bow), while all but a few rare varieties of halo are seen in the neighborhood of the luminous source.

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