

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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MIRAGE ON EVEREST

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman  
Authority on Meteorology

F. S. Smythe, one of the world's best known mountaineers, was a member of the Mount Everest expedition of 1933. In a chapter that he contributes to Hugh Ruttledge's recent book about the expedition he describes an experience that befell him while he was making a solitary climb between two of the camps. He says: "I was still some 200 feet above Camp VI and a considerable distance horizontally from it when, chancing to glance in the direction of the north ridge, I saw two curious-looking objects floating in the sky. They strongly resembled kite-balloons in shape, but one possessed what appeared to be squat underdeveloped wings, and the other a protuberance suggestive of a beak. They hovered motionless but seemed slowly to pulsate, a pulsation incidentally much slower than my own heart-beats, which is of interest supposing that it was an optical illusion. The two objects were very dark in colour and were silhouetted sharply against the sky, or possibly a background of cloud..... Just as I was starting to move again a mist suddenly drifted across. Gradually they disappeared behind it, and when a minute or two later it had drifted clear, exposing the whole of the north ridge once more, they had vanished as mysteriously as they came."

Mr. Smythe is uncertain whether to attribute this spectacle to imagination or mirage. It may well have been a case of "superior mirage," due to a sharp contrast in temperature between cold air adjacent to the snow-clad mountain slope and warmer air above.

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