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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ALPINE RAIN AND SNOW

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman  
Authority on Meteorology

The total precipitation--or, as it is often loosely called "rainfall"--at any place includes both rain and snow. The latter is melted before it is measured, or the depth of water it represents is computed. The average yearly rainfall of New York City is 43 inches; that of Toronto, 31 inches. The wettest known spot in the United States--in northwestern Oregon--has an average of about 131 inches. How do these figures compare with the rainfall of the high Alps?

It has become possible in recent years to answer this question, because in many uninhabited Alpine districts there have been installed gauges of the kind known as "totalizers", which collect the rainfall of an entire year. There are now upwards of 120 of these instruments in the Swiss Alps, which are visited at least once a year, when the accumulated rainfall is measured.

Thus we learn that at heights from 10,000 to 13,000 feet above sea level the rainfall in many places exceeds 120 inches a year. In some parts of the cantons of Valais and St. Gall the mountain gauges show an average rainfall of four meters (157 inches).

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2101 Constitution Ave.  
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