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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SO-CALLED "WATERSPOUTS"

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Authority on Meteorology

A waterspout is a column of cloud, formed over water, indicating the location of a vortex in the air. No other kind of waterspout is now recognized by meteorologists, but in everyday language the word "waterspout" is often applied to a heavy downpour of rain, also known as a "cloudburst", and this popular use of the term is found in some of the older books on meteorology--Greely's "American Weather" for example.

The New English Dictionary quotes an example as early as 1779: "The waterspouts which fell into the middle of those narrow streets almost deluged us."

The following is from Scott's "Guy Mannering": "Heaps of gravel and stones, which had been swept together when some torrent or waterspout from the neighboring hills over-flowed the marshy grounds below."

George Borrow, in his "Bible in Spain", says: "The demons of the cloudsassailed them with waterspouts as they toiled up the steep winding paths."

In Lincolnshire, England, rays of sunlight pouring through a break in the clouds are sometimes called waterspouts.

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