ASTRONOMY

17-Year Star Eclipse

Record eclipse now in progress in southern sky will last another five or six years. Telescope needed to spot this unusual stellar event.

➤ A RECORD star eclipse lasting 17 years is now in progress in the southern skies.

One star of a double star team started passing between us and its companion about 12 years ago. The eclipse will not end and the double star return to maximum brightness for another five or six years.

This is the longest eclipse on record, if calculations are correct.

The two stars, which in telescopes have always appeared as one, probably complete their swing around each other once every 200 years, the Rev. D. J. K. O'Connell of Riverview College Observatory, Sydney, New South Wales, estimates.

Usually two eclipsing stars swing around each other within a few hours, days or weeks. There are only seven other eclipsing double stars with periods longer than 1,000 days. Four of these take under 20 years to complete their swing, one takes slightly over 20 years, another some 24 years, and the seventh 40 years. This star probably has a period of 200 years.

The new double star is in the southern constellation of Centaurus, the centaur. A good telescope is needed to find it as it is normally of the ninth magnitude.

At maximum the eclipsing star is almost twice as bright as at the height of the eclipse. Stellar photographs taken throughout the past two decades show that the brightness of the star remained constant until about 1939. During the next eight years it dropped from magnitude 9.5 to magnitude 10.25.

The star is now getting brighter again, but will not return to maximum for another five or six years. If the eclipse is partial, it will last 17 to 18 years in all; if total, it will probably last longer, Fr. O'Connell reports in the MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY (Vol. 3, No. 1). To astronomers the star is known as C.P.D. -60 degrees 3278.

Science News Letter, December 8, 1951

TECHNOLOGY

Rubber Containers May Supply Troops by Air

➤ ARMY FIELD troops may some day be supplied with gasoline, water and other liquids dropped to them in rubber containers now being tested at Fort Lee, Va.

Developed by the General Tire and Rubber Company, the five-gallon disks are made of synthetic rubber. It is believed that the special containers will prove more accurate for aerial delivery than parachute-rigged containers.

When dropped from altitudes of 200 to 2,000 feet, none of the rubber disks burst. When they hit the ground, the containers stretch to almost double their normal diameter of two feet, then bounce back into the air and settle down near the point of contact. Tests were conducted under the supervision of Henry G. Alley, Jr., of the Army's Quartermaster Board.

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DROPPING LIQUIDS—Before loading for test drops, three engineers check the experimental 5-gallon synthetic rubber containers planned for aerial supply of varied liquids. At right can be seen a standard container.

METEOROLOGY

Half of Nation to Have Warm December

➤ WHETHER SANTA Claus has snow and cold weather for his annual rounds this month depends on what happens to a very deep low pressure area in the Gulf of Alaska.

Such a low pressure area largely prevents the cold temperatures of the Arctic from getting much below the Canadian border. It speeds up the westerly wind currents, sending storms scurrying over Canada and bringing in warm Pacific air behind them. If the low persists throughout the month we will have a warm, dry December over most of the nation.

However, the Weather Bureau's extended forecast section points out that lows like this are delicate and sensitive. They can disappear for short periods of time, allowing the cold blasts to come down from the north. Therefore, it is predicted that, while the southern half of the nation and the Pacific Northwest can expect temperatures to average above the seasonal normal, the northern plains, the Great Lakes regions and the Atlantic seaboard can expect large week-to-week fluctuations in temperature. These fluctuations, they say, should average out for the month to about normal.

Snow will be below normal over the Rocky Mountain states and the northern plains. The eastern half of the nation can expect about the usual amount of snow and rain, while only the West Coast states will receive more precipitation than usual.

Science News Letter, December 8, 1951

INVENTION

Patent Answer to Catsup Bottle Problem

➤ JOHN C. LOWE, Jr., Youngwood, Pa., thinks he has the answer to what to do about the catsup bottle. He has received patent 2,572,167 for his invention which is called a catsup dispenser. It is an auxiliary closure and dispenser which is stuck on the top of catsup bottles. It excludes the air which causes the catsup to dry and clog the neck of the bottle.

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