

Eclipse Arrived Early

THE total eclipse of the sun visible in California last April 28 was 1.7 seconds early. At the meeting of the American Astronomical Society in Chicago at the Adler Planetarium and Astronomical Museum, Dr. Edison Pettit, Mt. Wilson Observatory astronomer, told of the determination of the time that he and his colleague, Dr. Seth B. Nicholson, made from a talking movie news reel.

The movies were made from Honey Lake, Calif., where the Mt. Wilson party was stationed. They were made at the rate of twenty-four pictures a second, and in the sound track along the side of the film were recorded Dr. Pettit's counts of the time. From the film Drs. Pettit and Nicholson have found that the middle of the eclipse occurred at 19 hours 5 minutes 51.4 seconds, Greenwich Civil Time, which is five hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. The predicted time for the Mt. Wilson station, allowing for the 4,000 foot altitude, was 19 hours, 5 minutes, 53.1 seconds.

Astronomy

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NATURE RAMBLINGS

By Frank Thone



Waiting for a Break

With very few exceptions, man's cultivated food plants have been in use since prehistoric times. When they come to us as "new" products, like dasheens or alligator pears, it merely means that they have been cultivated and used by people somewhere else since time immemorial and have just recently started on their travels. They may be new to us, but they are certainly old to somebody else.

Most of the cultivated plants of the world are improved editions of

wild plants that originally grew (and frequently still grow) in those regions where man first ceased to be a savage hunter and food-gatherer and became a civilized herdsman and cultivator. Most of our cereals, vegetables and fruits, therefore, can be traced to such centers of ancient civilization as the eastern end of the Mediterranean, the valley of the Ganges and the Andean plateau. These have given us wheat, rice and corn; onions, oranges and potatoes.

But in regions where man remained savage longer, depending still on what wild food he could gather, there are plants on which he used to depend to a considerable extent that are doubtless only "waiting for a break" to prove their worth as additions to our menu. The Indians of our western plains, for example, gathered the wild berries of the ground-cherry, the black nightshade and the wolf-grape. The pioneer mothers of Iowa and the Dakotas and Kansas, two and three generations ago, made acceptable jam and pies of these same wild fruits, until stocks of cultivated berries and trees could be established. Since then they have again been neglected, save for such brief flashes in the pan as Burbank's Wonder-Berry, which was nothing but the common black nightshade put through a brief course of breeding. There must be good in these wild fruits. Who will bring it out?

Horticulture

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Lions in Alaska

ALASKA, with its vast herds of Alcaribou, its foxes and beaver, its mountain sheep and goats and its great bears, black, brown, grizzly and white, is one of the world's game paradises; but a hundred thousand years ago, long before the slow-witted men who then inhabited Europe thought to follow them, the peninsula (then an isthmus to Asia) teemed with great beasts that are only fossils now. There were huge, earth-shaking elephants with tusks a dozen feet long, magnificent, maned lions, and the high-shouldered ancestors of our modern bison. A bit of this great zoological hegira from the Old World to the New has been caught in a painting by Mrs. E. Rungius Fulda, and is reproduced on the cover of this week's SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER through the courtesy of Natural History.

Paleontology

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