Science Notes

"Flagstaff Cloud" on Cover Of AAAS 'Science' Magazine.

By WILLIAM HOYT

The "Flagstaff cloud," whatever it turns out to be, got some nationwide attention this week, its portrait graceing the cover of "Science," the official magazine of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

The picture of the strange and bulky cloud, which appeared briefly near Flagstaff last Feb 19, was taken by the astronomers near Chapman Verde and submitted to "Science" along with a 2,000-word preliminary report by Dr. James F. McDonald of the University of Arizona's Institute of Atmospheric Physics, the scientist who has spent the greater part of the past two months chasing clues to its formation.

Mr. McDonald, who is also an expert on meteorological patterns, is expected to submit a full-length article in the near future. He says he has been able to determine that the cloud was formed at an altitude of about 15,000 feet, which is considered to be the cloud's "ceiling." He says the cloud's formation is not unusual and he has observed it several times in the past.

The cloud's formation is due to a sudden change in temperature, which causes the air to become unstable and rise. The cloud is then formed when the rising air cools and condenses into clouds.

It is not clear what caused the sudden change in temperature, but it could be due to a number of factors, such as the movement of a front or a change in ocean currents.

Charles McCormick, director of the University of Arizona's Institute of Atmospheric Physics, says he is continuing to study the cloud and hopes to publish a full report in the near future.