



Armadillo

➤ WHEN the Spaniards first climbed up on the plateaus of Mexico they found creatures in coats of mail, no less wearers of armor than Cortez himself. To these the intrigued conquerors gave a lasting name, "Armadillo," a Spanish word which translated as a whole English phrase: "Little fellow in armor."

The armadillos in the United States, a nine-banded family, are the country's only armored animal and the only representative of the edentates, zoological division which also includes the sloth, the ant-eaters and the aard-vark. The last-named, an African ant-eater, has gained fame by being the first full word in Mr. Webster's dictionary.

Since the time of Cortez the armadillo has worked north from Central America, crossing the Rio Grande into Texas about a hundred years ago. They may now be found from New Mexico eastward to Louisiana and as far north as the Oklahoma Panhandle. In somewhat different form, as baskets, their shells may be found in curio shops everywhere.

In ancient times, South American armadillos grew to monstrous size, as long as 16 feet, and perhaps looked at the world with more aggressiveness than their descendants do today.

But now, from large leathery ears to the tip of a tail which resembles a series of telescoping funnels, Mr. Armadillo measures no more than three feet. He is a confirmed pacifist liking nothing better than to be left alone; yet his strong odor and the groaning, grunting and snuffling with which he roots for food are often his undoing.

As protection against his greatest enemies, man, coyotes and mountain lions, nature has given him a thick, bony cuirass and surprising speed. When attacked or alarmed, he may bounce straight up into the air several times, then race away; or he may roll himself up into a ball and wait for the enemy to tire of the siege and go away. This is a last resort. Instead, he will try to dig a quick burrow with strong front claws. But he often gives himself away by leaving his long bony tail above-ground.

The night-prowling animal crosses shallow streams by walking on the bottom. For deeper crossings he huffs and puffs

up his insides until they are tight as a balloon and nearly as buoyant. Then he swims, holding his long slender snout above water.

The armadillo's offspring invariably arrives as quadruplets, all of the same sex and developed from a single fertilized egg.

Science News Letter, October 21, 1950

PHYSICS

Beads, Sparkling and Lustrous, Are Radioactive

See Front Cover

➤ TINY glass beads, some sparkling, others dark and lustrous, and all of them valuable, have been made by scientists at the Argonne National Laboratory in Chicago. They are shown on this week's cover of SCIENCE NEWS LETTER in comparison with the point of a common pin.

But you wouldn't want a necklace of them, because these are radioactive beads. They were made for experimental use, to give a small but intensely radioactive source that can be imbedded in living tissues to study the effects of radiation.

Details of their preparation are reported by Drs. Walter Kiseleski, George Svihla and Austin M. Brues in the journal, SCIENCE, (Oct. 6).

Science News Letter, October 21, 1950

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