

GEOPHYSICS

Arabian Peninsula Drifting from Africa

► BRITISH OCEANOGRAPHERS working for the International Indian Ocean Expedition have discovered additional evidence that the Arabian peninsula is drifting away from the African continent.

Dr. A. S. Laughton, of the National Institute of Oceanography, Wormely, Surrey, produced the evidence that Arabia is still drifting away from Africa. The drift began more than 20 million years ago and is now occurring at a rate of two centimeters each year.

"The Gulf of Aden is becoming an ocean," he said. North and south of the gulf there was a great similarity of geological features.

Wadis (dry river beds), which start from the south coast of Arabia, continue in African Somaliland. A counterclockwise rotation of eight degrees had apparently occurred since Arabia was joined to West Africa at one time.

• Science News Letter, 87:127 February 20, 1965

Nature Note

Winter King

► THE BRIGHT RED berries of the hawthorn hang in clusters on the thorny branches all through the winter. Sometimes these fruits are orange, yellow or black, but no matter the color, they are always a cheerful sight in the middle of drab winter.

The newest member of the family, Winter King hawthorn, a mutation of *Crataegus viridis*, bears exceptionally brilliant and numerous berries.

Members of the rose family, the hawthorns are a large group of small tough thorny trees and shrubs that are widely distributed in this continent and in Europe. There are about 800 species in North America, and 90 in China, Japan, Siberia, central and southwestern Asia and in Europe. In Europe, these thick, thorny shrubs were used for hedges—the word "haw" coming from the Anglo-Saxon word meaning fence or hedge.

Hawthorns are slow growing, and seldom reach more than 25 feet high. Numerous zigzag branches bear many long woody thorns. White or sometimes rose-colored flowers resembling pear or apple blossoms bloom in June, and in the fall, tiny colorful apples appear with thick shells and hang on all winter.

Looking attractive to artists and nature lovers at all seasons, these sturdy shrubs are a pesty nuisance to farmers because they invade pastures and abandoned fields and are hard to remove.

Goldfinches, cardinals, cedar waxwings and robins love these trees for their berries and also for their thorny protection for their nests against such predators as cats, hawks and egg collectors.

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