

Do You Know?

Coaxial *cable*, placed underground for long-distance multiple telephone conversations and for television transmission, is coated with a special copper jacketing in areas subject to frequent electrical storms.

Wood rots through attack of fungi or organisms; wood weathering, on the other hand, is a slow process of wearing away due to fiber expansion and shrinkage caused by changing moisture content.

The production of metal *hydrides* is an increasing industry in America, the products being used principally in metallurgy; calcium hydride was used during the war to generate hydrogen for instrument-carrying balloons.

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VOLCANOLOGY

Iceland's Hekla Among Most Active Volcanoes

See Front Cover

➤ HEKLA, the "back gate to hell," as it was called in medieval Iceland, is one of the world's most active volcanoes. Its recorded history begins in the year A. D. 1114, when there was a rain of sand in the winter. Although the main crater has been on a vacation since 1878, there was an eruption through a subsidiary vent in 1913.

Hekla's greatest recorded eruption occurred just over a century ago, when the mountain disgorged lava and spewed up hot ashes over a period of seven months. Total volume of the ash was estimated at nearly half a billion cubic yards. Some of it, borne on winds in the upper air, was carried as far as western Germany.

The worst danger from Iceland's volcanoes is not the direct threat of lava rivers and ash showers, but the chance of the hot lava coming into contact with snow and ice fields and melting them into disastrous floods.

Science News Letter, April 12, 1947

ASTRONOMY

New Ninth Magnitude Comet Spotted Near North Star

➤ A NEW COMET is in the vicinity of the north star. Of the ninth magnitude, it is too faint to be seen with the naked eye or binoculars, but may be picked up with a small telescope. The comet will be named after its discoverer, Dr. Antonin Becvar, director of the new modern astrophysical observatory near Skalnaté Pleso (Rocky Lake) in Czechoslovakia.

Spotted in the constellation of Draco, the dragon, the diffuse object moved rapidly across the northern sky into the constellation of Camelopardus, the giraffe. Astronomers and amateurs with telescopes available, both in this country and in Europe, are anxiously watching its flight. Comet Becvar, first spotted on March 27, was located several days later at the Students' observatory of the University of California at Berkeley.

First word of the comet was cabled by Dr. Elis Stroemgren of Copenhagen University Observatory, world astronomical information bureau, to Harvard College Observatory, clearing house for astronomical news in the western hemisphere.

Late last May a sixth magnitude comet

was found by another keen-eyed astronomer in Czechoslovakia, Ludmila Pajdusakova, also of this observatory. The comet was independently discovered by David Rotbart, Washington business man, so is known as the Pajdusakova-Rotbart Comet.

Science News Letter, April 12, 1947

AGRICULTURE

Fertilizer Does Not Kill Soil's Useful Earthworms

➤ SPRING gardening note:

You needn't hesitate about putting fertilizer on your soil for fear of killing the useful earthworms in it.

The rather widespread belief that fertilizers harm earthworms has been tested at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and found erroneous.

Samples of soil were taken from a plot of land on which a lespedeza crop had been grown for five years, with heavy applications of fertilizer each year. An earthworm census was taken from these samples, and the results interpreted in terms of an acre.

The count came out as approximately 1,320,000 earthworms per acre, all in the top 18 inches of soil.

Science News Letter, April 12, 1947



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