

NEWS RELEASE

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Ancient Armadillo Unearthed Near La Union

LAS CRUCES – Paleontologists today unearthed the shell of an approximately 2 million-year-old ancestor of the modern armadillo, found on public land in southern New Mexico, according to BLM-Las Cruces Field Office Manager Amy Lueders.

“We’ve unearthed the shell of a ‘Glyptotherium Arizonae’, the armored, tank-like relative of the modern armadillo,” said Gary S. Morgan, curator of paleontology for the New Mexico Museum of Natural History (NMMNH).

Paul Sealey, an adjunct naturalist at the museum, discovered the shell in April, near La Union, Dona Ana County. Morgan later uncovered about 4 x 2 feet of shell and this week directed a small team of scientists who worked for about two days to expose the remainder. Today the team poured a ceramic-like mold around the shell and lifted the approximately 5x4x3-foot, 1,000-pound block onto a truck for transport to the NMMNH in Albuquerque.

Glyptodont shells were composed of more than 1,000 inch-thick bony plates called osteoderms or scutes. The shell or carapace of the species of Glyptodont known in New Mexico was almost 6 feet long, 4 feet tall and 4 feet wide.

Glyptodonts originated in South America and first appeared in the American Southwest after North and South America connected at the Isthmus of Panama, about 2.5 million years ago, according to Morgan.

At least two other partial Glyptodont shells have been collected near La Union. One shell is in the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the other is in the Centennial Museum at the University of Texas, El Paso. Morgan said the shell unearthed today eventually may be exhibited at the NMMNH in Albuquerque.

“The BLM is happy to have a part in helping bring these priceless discoveries to public education and enjoyment,” Lueders said. The agency manages more than 5.5 million acres in southwestern New Mexico and about 13 million acres throughout the state.