



# Ammonites

By

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Ammonites are fossils of a class of mollusks called cephalopods (sef-a-low-pods).

Cephalopod means “head foot.”

Cephalopods have feet or tentacles coming out of their heads!

You already know about some cephalopods. Squid and octopus are members of this class.

Ammonites were similar to the squid and octopus except they had a shell to protect their bodies. Most of the ammonites had shells that were flat spirals. A few had other shapes.

The first ammonites lived during the Devonian Period. This was about 370 million years ago. The Devonian Period was a part of the Paleozoic Era.

Ammonites like all cephalopods were carnivores. They hunted and ate other animals. They used their tentacles to catch their food. They had a strong beak for a mouth, like a parrot.

As the ammonite grew it added on to its shell. When the new part was big enough the ammonite would close off the old part with a wall of shell called a septa. This would leave an empty place called a camera or chamber. An ammonite shell usually has many chambers and septa.

The ammonite made a special tube that went through all of the septa to connect the empty chambers. This tube is called a siphuncle (sigh-fun-cal). The ammonite could fill the empty chambers with gas to help it float.

There were many kinds of ammonites. Some were less than an inch across. Some got to be as much as three feet across!

To tell ammonites apart you have to look very carefully at the shape of the shell, and the shape of the septa.

There were so many different kinds of ammonites that scientists use them to tell how old a layer of rock is.

The ammonites became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous Period. The Cretaceous Period was the last period of the Mesozoic Era. This was about 65 million years ago. Many animals became extinct at the same time as the ammonites including the dinosaurs. Some people think that a large meteor or comet collided with the earth at this time.

