A Bovine Rescue

A year-old cow is airlifted to safety in southwest Georgia after being rescued from a tiny island where she had been stranded for nearly a month by rising water. The animal is estimated to have lost 150 pounds during her ordeal, but is expected to recover.

ELLIOTT MINOR *Associated Press*

WYOMING

Students Return Purse Containing $43,000

Two college students returned a lost purse to its owner, not knowing the handbag contained her life savings of $43,000.

Derek Hopner and Adam Sinanian spotted the purse lying in the gutter of a Casper street Monday. After examining the bag, they pulled out a wallet, and on it found a phone number and ran to the purse's owner.

The owner had been traveling through Casper and apparently misplaced her purse during a stop, police said.

PALO ALTO

$13.5 Million Donated to Search for Alien Life

Microsoft Corp. co-founder Paul G. Allen is giving $13.5 million for research that includes looking for intelligent life in outer space, bringing his total donations to the radio astronomy project to $25 million.

Allen, the world's fifth-richest person, announced his latest gift Thursday at a science symposium Thursday for the Allen Telescope Array in Palo Alto.

In addition to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, the project is directed at examining quasars, cosmic explosions and the birth of stars for clues to the origins of the universe and its composition.

From Press-Stafford Wire Reports

NORTH CAROLINA

Women Recant, Freeing Man After 20 Years

Prosecutors in the town of Bolivia dropped charges against a man who served 20 years in prison after the two girls he was convicted of molesting recanted their stories.

The victims, who were 4 and 6 when they made the charges, testified that they falsely accused the man under pressure from their grandmother because she wanted to protect the real abuser – a cousin of the girls.

More than 40 members of the family of Sylvester Stallone, 83, were in court when the charges against him were dismissed.

OHIO

Clinic Approved for Facial Transplants

The Cleveland Clinic said it's the first institution to receive license board approval of human facial transplants for people disfigured by burns or disease.

Several independent medical teams around the world also are pursuing the procedure. The Cleveland Clinic said its approval on Oct. 15 followed six months of debate. It has no estimate or timeframe for the procedure.

"We are at this point ready to begin screening patients," said Dr. Maria Siemionow, director of plastic surgery research, who advocated the procedure to the clinic's review board.

IN BRIEF

ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST

Missing Man Found Hitchhiking on Highway

A ski resort caretaker, missing since Friday night, was found in good condition Tuesday morning hitchhiking on Angeles Crest Highway.

Sheriff's Deputy Alba Yates said Jeffrey Lee Hall, 51, was picked up about 8:45 a.m. by a utility subcontractor driving near the Mt. Waterman resort. Brugger apparently became lost while investigating a possible illegal campfire, Yates said.

NEVADA

Prisoners Sell Crafts, Give Proceeds to Charity

Christmas shoppers have a new place to load up on gifts in the state capital: the Nevada State Prison.

Purses, moccasins and leather-key chains are among inmate-made items for sale in the Carson City prison's Hobby Craft Store, which opened Friday.

Inmates purchase the materials to create the products, and donate the proceeds to nearby Empire Elementary School and Nevada Hispanic Services, he said.

From Three Wire Reports

PENNSYLVANIA

Man Quits Smoking, Gets Heart Transplant

The first person in the United States to get a revolutionary heart pump has gotten a longneeded heart transplant after finally convincing doctors he had stopped smoking.

Officials at Hershey Medical Center said Jeffrey Snyder, 36, of New York, received the heart of a 36-year-old man. Snider was in critical condition after the operation, a hospital official said.

Snider had needed a transplant since 1996, when his heart was severely damaged by an unknown condition. But for years, he was ineligible for a transplant because he smoked.

Red Wine Compound May Lengthen Life Span

The compound that makes red wine even a healthful drink may also hold the secret to a longer life, scientists reported this week in the journal Nature. They found that resveratrol acted on fruit flies and worms in the same way that a severe diet does to lengthen the life of animals including monkeys, sharply restricting how much they eat.

The finding opens the possibility that people could take a pill to achieve the same benefits as a severe diet, said study author Dr. David Sinclair, an assistant professor of biology at Harvard Medical School in Boston, who led the study.

'Evenatide can be very effective in controlling blood sugar.'

Robert Parente, analyst at Leerink Swann

FDA Is Asked to OK Diabetes Drug Made From Lizard Saliva

From Three Wire Services

A lizard has certainly become a pet project for a big San Diego biotech company.

Amylin Pharmaceuticals Inc. and Indianapolis-based Eli Lilly and Co. said on Monday they had asked the Food and Drug Administration for permission to market a new treatment for Type 2 diabetes.

The drug is derived from the saliva of a lizard known as the Gila monster that lives in the southwestern United States and Mexico. It has a sweet, scorpion-like sting.

Called Exenatide, the treatment is the first in a new class of medicines known as incretin mimetics to treat Type 2, or adult-onset, diabetes, which strikes when the body becomes insulin resistant and cells in the body do not respond normally to insulin.

"Exenatide can be very effective in controlling blood sugar, give patients a chance of losing weight and delay the need for insulin," said Robert Parente, analyst for Leerink Swann in Boston. Parente, who expects the drug to post eventual peak sales of $1 billion if it is approved.

Amylin and Lilly began collaborating on the development and commercialization of Exenatide in December 2000.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes, affecting an estimated 15 million Americans, and can lead to serious complications such as blindness and kidney disease. About 90% to 95% of diabetes cases are Type 2.

Exenatide, in three major trials, significantly reduced patients' blood sugar levels, the amount of average blood glucose levels over a three to four-month period. The average reduction in A1C in patients taking the highest dose of Exenatide was approximately 1%.

About 48% of the highest-dose patients in the trials got their A1C measurements down to or below 7%, a target level that many doctors believe reflects adequate blood sugar control.

The most common side effect of Exenatide was mild to moderate nausea. Few patients taking it developed serious cases of hypoglycemia, which can cause headaches, delirium or even coma or death, if they take too much medicine relative to eating habits.

Lilly and Amylin would equally split profit from U.S. sales of the medicine should it be approved by the FDA.

Shares of Lilly fell 34 cents to $69.61 on the New York Stock Exchange.

Amylin rose 40 cents to $22.28 on Nasdaq.

THE SOURCE: *The drug, called Exenatide, is developed from the saliva of a lizard known as the Gila monster.*

Puppy's Paw Puts an End to Man's Cruelty, Officials Say

From Three Wire Services

PENSACOLA, Fla. — A man who was trying to shoot down puppies was shot himself when one of the dogs put its paw on the gun's trigger, officials said Thursday.

Terry Allen Stratford, 37, was charged with felony animal cruelty, the Escambia County Sheriff's Office said. He was treated at a hospital for a gunshot wound to his wrist.

Stratford said he decided to shoot the 3-month-old dogs Wednesday night "for fun" because he couldn't find them a home, according to the sheriff's office.

He was holding two puppies when one put its paw on the trigger of the .38-caliber revolver, officials said.

The dog then bound three puppies in a shallow grave outside Bradford's home, said Sheriff's Lt. Ted Kop. The four others appeared to be in good health, Animal control officials plan to put them up for adoption.

NORTH CAROLINA

Exonerated Man Starts Investigation Nonprofit

A Winston-Salem man exonerated after spending 18 years in prison on a murder conviction has started a nonprofit foundation to help investigate inmates' innocence claims.

The Darryl Hunt Project for Freedom and Justice also will help freed inmates rejoin society.

Hunt, who was released from prison in June, said he wants to give them a voice, because "I know I was fortunate to have people supporting me and speaking up for me," Hunt said. "I was innocent, and I know how hard it is for people who are in prison to have voices on the outside to speak up for them."

ILLINOIS

Eco-Friendly Housing Designed for the Poor

Renowned architect Helmut Jahn has designed an environmentally friendly structure to house the poor.

Jahn's stainless steel and glass "single room occupancy" building is expected to be built next year on a lot near the Cabrini-Green housing project, which is gradually being torn down.

The 30-story, cylinder-shaped structure will consist of 160 units and include public areas where residents can meet and socialize.

From Three Wire Reports

Oldest Dwarf Mouse Strain Has Health — and Mojo

A dwarf mouse named Yoda has celebrated his fourth birthday, making him the oldest of his kind and far beyond live to three years, The University of Michigan Medical School says.

Yoda owes his longevity to genetic modifications that affected his pituitary and thyroid glands and reduced insulin production — just what's left him a bluish leather coat and an appetite for life, researchers say.

On the other hand, at the human equivalent of about 138 years, Yoda is still mobile, sexually active and "looking good," said Dr. Richard A. Miller, associate director of research at the school's geriatrics center.

From Press-Stafford Wire Reports

LIVELY: Yoda, left, at 4 years old doesn't move as much as his 6-month-old friend Hal (180 days younger).

Associated Press Photo

Ford to Recondition Think Electric Cars

From Bloomberg Wire

Ford Motor Co. said Thursday that it would ship as many as 1,000 Think electric cars to Norway, starting the revival of a failed project from the scrap heap.

Shipping giant **Wallenius Wilhelmsen** agreed to transport the cars from the U.S. and Europe to Norway, Ford said in a statement. U.S. Transportation Coast Guard judged acceptable for resale will be reconditioned and sold by Ford dealers in Norway, where they were made.

Think cars, leased for as many as three years in California and New York, were to be scrapped after the leases expired. The vehicles do not meet U.S. safety standards, and Ford had a waiver only for the lease period.

However, the decision to scrap the Think cars spurred protests from environmental groups. Last month, Greenpeace activists hung a Ford Think from headquarters.

The Think project, begun in 1998, was part of former Ford Executive Jacques Nasser's plan to expand into new businesses and sell environmentally friendly vehicles. Ford sold Think to a unified Nasser in late 2001 to become CEO and in 2002 pulled the plug on Think, selling it to Britain-based **Kazkorp** Ltd.

Since the Think investments, Ford has shifted its emphasis from electric cars to gasoline-electric hybrids and hydrogen-powered fuel cells, although production last month of a gasoline-electric hybrid version of its Escape small sport utility vehicle and said it might sell as many as 20,000 hybrid Escapes a year.

"This decision to save zero-emission Think vehicles, we believe, is a clear indication of Ford's lack of zero-emission vehicles," said Jennifer Krill, zero-emissions campaign director for the Rainforest Action Network.

SPARED: *Instead of being scrapped, the subsidized car went back to Norway. Above, Ernest Dahl in a Think car, shown in 2001.*

ANNE CHAKA *Los Angeles Times*

AND FINALLY . . .

Exonerated Man Getting $55 a Day for Jail Time

In North Carolina, freedom is worth about $55 a day.

Under that formula, the state is paying Darryl Hunt about $350,000 for the 18 years he spent in prison for a murder he didn't commit.

Hunt, 38, of Winston-Salem, was officially exonerated in February of the 1984 murder of newspaper copy editor Deborah Sykes, who was stabbed to death on her way to work. He was granted a pardon in April by Gov. Mike Easley.

From Three Wire Reports

Humans' Ancestral Tree Adds a Twig

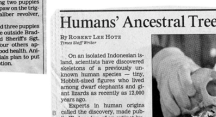
By Rosary Lee Hoyt
Times Staff Writer

On an isolated Indonesian island, scientists have discovered a tiny human skeleton unlike any known human species — tiny, Hobbit-sized figures who lived among dwarf elephants and giant lizards as recently as 12,000 years ago.

Experts in human origins called the discovery, made public Thursday, the most significant human species found in the last 50 years.

It is probably the most significant thing that has happened in my professional lifetime," said George Washington University paleoanthropologist Alan Walker. "It comes out of nowhere."

Found last year in a deep cave on an island called Flores east of Java, the creatures had the smallest brains and shortest bodies of any known human relatives during the last 2 million years.



BERNARD LANG *Associated Press*

OUR TINY COUSINS: *On an Indonesian island, bones were found of a 3-foot species whose survival strategy was simple: grow smaller. The new species' skull, left, with a Homo sapiens version.*

One of the last 4 million years. Yet, on the time scale of human beginnings, the skeletal remains were so new that the bones had yet to actually fossilize. The creatures lived at the same time as modern Homo sapiens.

Over the last 13 months, a team of Australian and Indonesian researchers led by paleoanthropologist Peter Brown of

(See Species, Page A4)

Robotic Legs Aim to Take a Load Off

An invention out of UC Berkeley could boost endurance for soldiers and others.

From Associated Press

Move over Bionic Man and make room for BLEEX — the Berkeley Lower Extremity Exoskeleton, with strap-on robotic legs designed to help an ordinary human into a super soldier.

Intended to help people such as soldiers and firefighters carry heavy loads for long distances, these boots are made for marching.

"The design of this exoskeleton really benefits a person with limited endurance strength," said Dr. Homayoon Kazerooni, who directs the Robotics and Human Engineering Laboratory at UC Berkeley.

The exoskeleton consists of a pair of mechanical metal legs that include a power unit and a backpack-like frame. The braces are attached to a person's feet, legs and boots and are also connected, in front, more rigidly, to the user's legs.

More than 40 sensors and hydraulic mechanisms function like a human nervous system, constantly monitoring how to distribute the weight of the load so the wearer can bear the weight.

"There is no joystick, no help command, but instead to drive the device," said Kazerooni, a professor of mechanical engineering. "The pilot becomes an integral part of the exoskeleton."

In experiments, he said, testers have walked around in the 100-pound exoskeleton plus a 70-pound backpack and felt as if they were carrying just five pounds.

Eventually, the device may help astronauts and heavy-equipment op-tugh-one buildings or

THE SOURCE: *The drug, called Exenatide, is developed from the saliva of a lizard known as the Gila monster.*

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(See Species, Page A4)

Dog Survives 4 Weeks in a Pit

Two hikers rescue a family's pet left for dead after it fell into 30-foot deep hole.

From Associated Press

A family who left their dog for dead after a desert hiking accident four weeks ago has been reunited with the pet after a Riverside County hiker and his girlfriend heard its cries and pulled it from a pit 30 feet deep.

Reuven Schwartz, 17, was hiking with his brother, father and two cousins on April 18 near the ghost town of Pinacate City on the western edge of Death Valley when he fell down their 30-year-old dog, Shadow, 150 into the pit.

The Schwartzes heard the dog whimpering and tried to use an aluminum ladder from a nearby camper shell to get it out, but the ladder fell out of reach. Eventually Shadow stopped responding to their calls.

Thinking the dog was dead, the Schwartzes placed an ironwood-wood over the pit, and left a message on their home in Tewas, a town in San Bernardino County. But Shadow was very much alive, surviving on water in the hole.

On Sunday, Scott Meeks, 21, of Temecula, and his brother, Darren, 24, of Ridgecrest, were searching for the source of a spring near Pinacate City.

They stumbled on a deep, 4-foot-wide pit with a cross over it.

Curious to rest, the brothers kicked rocks into the pit and dared each other to climb inside. Then they heard barking.

"We looked at each other and my brother said, 'Oh my God, there's a dog in the hole!'" Scott Meeks said. "We were just horrified that there was a dog down there."

Darren Meeks added, "We weren't going to leave without the dog."

Using an old hose from a nearby abandoned tank, Darren lowered his brother into the hole until he could reach the ladder and climb down to the dog. Scott Meeks managed to grab a frightened and exhausted Shadow, and his brother hauled them up.

The Meeks brothers called the number on Shadow's tags.

"This tops the list. I never felt so happy before," Stephen Schwartz said Tuesday.

The 3-year spaniel-beagle mix appeared to be in good health despite losing 5 pounds, he said.

NEVADA

Prisoners Sell Crafts, Give Proceeds to Charity

Christmas shoppers have a new place to load up on gifts in the state capital: the Nevada State Prison.

Purses, moccasins and leather-key chains are among inmate-made items for sale in the Carson City prison's Hobby Craft Store, which opened Friday.

Inmates purchase the materials to create the products, and donate the proceeds to nearby Empire Elementary School and Nevada Hispanic Services, he said.

From Three Wire Reports

BRITAIN

5 Rescued After 8 Days Adrift on a Life Raft

Five boaters were rescued off southwest England after eight days adrift in a life raft. When their 30-foot boat began taking on water, they said, they tried to attract attention with distress calls, flares and burning tins.

Even setting fire to the craft, thought to rescue, as they boarded the raft. Water ran out Tuesday, but they drifted into cellphone range a day later. The coast guard sent a helicopter.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2004 A

Clue to Nicotine Addiction Found

Study locates a brain receptor that binds with the drug, causing a jolt of pleasure. The finding may prove key in fighting cravings.

By Thomas H. Maugh II
Times Staff Writer

Caltech researchers have found the receptor in the brain where nicotine exerts its most powerful effects, a finding that could lead to new ways to combat tobacco addiction.

Nicotine is generally considered one of the most addictive substances known, stronger than even cocaine and heroin. Its long-term effects of smoking are devastating. More than 4 million people worldwide die each year from diseases caused or exacerbated by smoking, but the majority of smokers are unable to stop.

The reason, according to Caltech biologist Henry A. Lester and his colleagues, is a receptor molecule in the brain called alpha4. The receptor is normally the target of a neurotransmitter called acetylcholine, which binds to it and causes a cell to release dopamine, which produces a pleasurable sensation.

Nicotine binds to the same receptor, also producing a pleasurable jolt. But the enzyme that destroys acetylcholine have no effect on nicotine, so it stays attached to the receptor much longer — which may explain its great addiction potential.

Lester and his colleagues reported in this week's Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that they identified alpha4's key role by modifying its structure to make nicotine bind to it much more strongly.

They then exposed mice to nicotine in the altered receptors to very low levels of nicotine — much too low to affect any other receptors in the brain — and found that the animals still exhibited a very powerful response to the drug. That demonstrated for the first time that the interaction between nicotine addiction and alpha4 and developing drugs to block its activity might help wean people off smoking.

A39 SATURDAY, JANUARY 1

Right Whale Untangled and Freed

From Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Scientists freed a young whale from more than 100 feet of fishing gear Friday after rising alongside the animal on a Coast Guard cutter for nearly 24 hours.

The fishing gear had wrapped around the whale's tail and mouth when it was first sighted on Sunday, said Barb Goodenia, a right whale recovery coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who was part of the rescue team.

The team, which had been following the whale since Thursday, had to wait for high tide and enough sunlight to be free to see the whale down so the fishing lines could be cut. But the whale fought, and the pressure eventually pulled the lines from the whale's mouth, officials said.

"The whale — as soon as the line parted — it took off like a shot," Goodenia said in a telephone interview.

But as we were excited is a severe understatement, I think," she said."A lot of us were at a loss for what to feel because we have not experienced too many good stories, happy-story endings with this species."

Endangered right whales were hunted almost to extinction by the early 1900s, and there are only about 300 in the world.

School's Stolen Computers Found on EBay

Two students are arrested in the theft of $50,000 worth of equipment after a teacher spotted the items for sale on the Internet.

By Wendy Thomas
Times Staff Writer

A Palos Verdes High School teacher guessed this week that whoever took $50,000 worth of computers from his classroom would try to lease them to cyberspace. He guessed right.

On a hunch, 39-year-old Alan Evans combed listings on the Internet auction site eBay and found the items that were stolen from his classroom. He guessed right.

What did surprise him was that "anyone could think that there's any kind of anonymity" with online auctions.

Sheriff's deputies on Tuesday arrested Andrew Hun Kim, 18, of Redondo Beach and Jason Chester Phelps, 18, of Redondo Beach on suspicion of burglary. Both are seniors on campus but are not in Evans' digital animation course that uses 18 graphics-intensive Macintosh OS computers costing $5,000 apiece.

"I think they were trying to use it for their own benefit, I guess you could," said Los Angeles County Sheriff's Sgt. Dennis Craff, supervising investigator in the case. "From what I understand, they were good students, but what they did wasn't very intelligent."

Batteries jimmied a door at Palos Verdes High School on Oct. 29. The next day, a Saturday, Evans came in to do some work and discovered the computers gone, along with the students' work stored on them.

"The kids felt completely violated," Evans said. "This class is part of a dream of theirs to go into the animation industry. They live for this stuff."

After notifying sheriff's deputies, Evans monitored eBay.

"I thought, 'There's no way one person is going to keep all those computers,'" he said. "I'm not familiar with any street-level fence that would be on Palos Verdes. So I went on EBay."

With a few keystrokes, a listing popped up for the 16 computers, 16 flat-screen monitors and two addresses that investigators used to arrest Kim and Phelps. Deputies found the computers in a Torrance storage facility. None had been sold.

Evans is a former animation industry professional who developed the digital video course at the high school after the first time they "won," he said.

"I have a ton invested in this program, so no one should be surprised that I went after it a bit," Evans said.

"He gets a gold star on his forehead, that's for sure," Principal Kelly Johnson said.

Johnson commended Evans, his Palos Verdes Unified School District and the animation industry for their efforts in the case.

"I think he should be commended for his efforts," Craff said. "We check EBay, but we start with pawnshops."

Johnson suspended Kim and Phelp and began expulsion proceedings.

"There are a lot of things kids do that are kid nonsense. This is kid nonsense; this is theft, and I have zero tolerance for that," he said.

The suspects were released from Los Padres Juvenile Hall. The case is being forwarded to the district attorney's office for review of possible charges, Craff said.

By Friday, workers were reinstalling the computers. Evans said that when his students learned the equipment was back, "the room erupted in cheers."

DNA Tests Set Man Free After 19 Years

From Associated Press

DRAPER, Utah — A man who has been in prison based fears for his girlfriend's safety and recently was released Tuesday after being cleared by DNA testing.

"I'm out of here," Bruce Dallas Goodman, 54, said with a smile as he walked out of Utah State Prison.

Goodman was convicted in 1985 of the rape of Sandie Williams Sherry Ann Pace Williams, who was raped, sodomized, beaten to death and left bound of in mine in state highway exit.

Testing but month on vaginal samples from the victim and a cigarette butt at the scene found DNA from two unidentified men but not from Goodman.

A judge threw out Goodman's conviction after prosecutor Von Christiansen said he had no plans to retry the case. The Utah attorney general's office also called for the conviction to be thrown out. "I'm still uneasy," Christiansen said. "I guess I made my decision because it seems the few DNA results we have are reasonable doubt."

Goodman was sentenced to five years to life in prison after being convicted by a judge in a 1985 non-jury trial.

Sandie Williams Williams up was the same-kind used at Goodman's workplace, and a crude, early blood test matched Goodman's blood type — but also that of about a third of the population. Witnesses also had reported seeing Goodman with Williams in his vehicle hours before the murder.

Goodman and two defense witnesses said he was in California when Williams was attacked.

After learning for years that he was innocent, Goodman accepted responsibility for the crime at a parole hearing in 2002. He said he did not remember it, but he believes Rowland, said Goodman was just trying to win favor with the parole board.

Boy Trapped in Well Is Rescued After 13 Hours

Rescuers toiled for 13 hours, using a mammoth drill, to save a toddler trapped at the bottom of an abandoned well in Frisco City, Ala. More than 300 people had gathered by the time Evan Mathis, 2, was pulled through the tight fit. Contributed Dollar $8 Million, who was playing with his older brother and sister near his grandparents' house when he disappeared from the 14-foot well that was overgrown with grass and unknown to neighbors and firefighters. Dejour, right, is examined at the scene by a doctor before being taken to the hospital for treatment of minor bruises and dehydration. Officials said that when Frisco City firefighters and police arrived, they realized they needed help and called for a rescue team from Mobile with special training. An Alabama Power Co. drill was used to dig a shaft next to the one where the little boy was trapped. Rescue workers then tunneled over to the well to reach the child about 3:45 a.m. Monday.

Cactus Extract Eases Hangovers, Study Says

NATIONWIDE

A study has found that an extract of prickly pear cactus can reduce hangover symptoms.

The 16 adults in the study who received the extract of Opuntia ficus-indica instead of a placebo before getting drunk reported milder hangovers, according to the research conducted at Tulane University in New Orleans and published in the Archives of Internal Medicine.

The study was funded in part by a firm that marketing a product with the same extract. The Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute also funded the study.

From Three Wire Services

Brothers Rescued After 3 Nights Near Mt. Baldy

From a Times Staff Writer

Twin brothers who were lost in whiteout conditions for three nights near Mt. Baldy were rescued Wednesday.

Richard Tomas of Rancho Cucamonga and Robert Enrique of West Covina set out Sunday morning for a hike in the San Gabriel Mountains.

The 44-year-old men called that night to say they were planning to spend the night in the Icehouse Saddle area off Mt. Baldy. When they hadn't returned by Tuesday afternoon, search and rescue workers were dispatched to look for them.

Rescuers found the men in a remote area of the mountains. The agreed pair was airlifted to safety by a helicopter crew.

Tomas had set out to scale the mountain Tuesday night but turned back because of whiteout conditions. On Wednesday, rescuers set out again and found the brothers.

Twins Born to Popular San Diego Zoo Panda

Hua Mei was sent to China to breed in a dual-nation effort to save the species.

By Tony Perry
Times Staff Writer

SAN DIEGO — Hua Mei, the giant panda born here 25 years ago at the San Diego Zoo and sent to China to mate with a male, has given birth to twin girls in her ancestral China.

Both mother and cubs were reportedly in good shape at the Wolong Giant Panda Breeding Center in Sichuan province, 90 miles northwest to the heart of the birth. The cubs, roughly the size of sticks of butter, weigh about 4 ounces each. One is male, the gender of the other hasn't been determined.

The births were another hopeful sign for efforts by both countries to save the endangered species, zoo officials said Wednesday. Although there is dispute about the numbers, the panda population in their native China is thought to have dwindled to near extinction.

Hua Mei was transferred to Wolong in February to breed. Her leave-taking occasioned considerable sorrow in San Diego, where the mating, naming and mothering of the zoo's pandas is the subject of intense public interest.

Zoo officials arranged for Hua Mei to engage in "significant bouts of mating" with Ling Ling and to be artificially inseminated with sperm from Shuan Shuan, both grown studs. Their blood tests are done on the subs, their paternity is unproven. But Don Lindburg, the zoo's panda specialist who recently cuddled Wolong, is betting on Ling Ling.

One result of the San Diego-China pact is a requirement that all offspring of what panda specialists call the "global breeding" stream be exchanged for conserving mating among pandas.

The reason for the pandas' population decline, besides poaching and destruction of the Panda, Page A7)

NEW: *Hua Mei, shown in 2003, already lived to hold her cubs.*

Scott Kraft Image Archive

Seinfeld's shirt in the Smithsonian

Move over, ruby slippers. Puffy shirt's moving in.

An outlandishly unbuttoned-to-the-navel shirt worn by Jerry Seinfeld on his hit TV show went on display Friday at the Smithsonian Institution's Kenneth E. Behring Center, where it will be seen by millions.

At the end of the show's season run, "Seinfeld" left lots of well-loved but few tangible relics suitable for enshrinement in the National Museum of American History. Thus, the Puffy Shirt, which appeared briefly in a single episode.

In episode No. 86, comedian Jerry decides to prove he could be cool. He'll make out what his pal Kramer's girlfriend is asking — she's a "low talker." Later, to his horror, he learns that to woo over the goofy, puffy shirt she designed when he appears on the "Today" show.

The white shirt, looking like a pirate's ruffled nightmare, was designed in real life by the show's costumer, Charmaine Simmons.

"This might be the first joke shirt ever in the Smithsonian Institution," Behring curator

From Associated Press

Boy band Menudo will see new life

Menudo, the popular Puerto Rican teen pop band of the '70s and '80s, is being revived.

Menudo Entertainment bought all the merchandising and property rights about a month ago from Saban Inc., the entertainment mogul who created the long-lived Power Rangers franchise. Menudo was formed in 1977. Three boys were booted when they turned 16 and the group had almost 30 different members before disbanding in 1997. Menudo has sold more than 30 million albums in English and Spanish.

From Associated Press

CS TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2004 LOS ANGE

Ford May Kill Off Its Excursion

From Bloomberg News

Ford Motor Co. next year will kill off the Ford Excursion, its largest sport utility vehicle and a lightning rod for criticism from environmental groups, a person familiar with the plan said Monday.

The vehicle will stop rolling off the assembly line in September as the Ford owners have production capacity for the refreshed Super Duty pickup truck, said the source, on condition of anonymity.

The Excursion and Super Duty F-Series pickups are assembled at the automaker's Louisville, Ky., truck plant. Ford said last week that the company would discontinue the 10-foot Excursion in 2005, but it would up getting an extended lease on life.

A Ford spokesman declined to comment on the product plan.

The second-largest U.S. auto maker is planning to fill the gap in its full-size product lineup with an extended version of its Expedition sport utility vehicle.

U.S. sales of the Excursion, which was launched in 1999, are down 25% so far this year. The Sierra Club, which dubbed the Excursion the "Ford Valdez" after the infamous oil spill in Alaska, called it an environmental disaster because of its poor fuel economy.

Gasoline mileage figures are not available from Ford or the Environmental Protection Agency, but a review on Kelly Blue Book's website says the Excursion gets about 14 miles per gallon in city driving and 19 mpg on the highway.

In addition to the Excursion, Ford also plans to kill its Lincoln Aviator, a mid-size SUV that made its debut in 2001. It will be replaced with a car-based SUV in 2006 that will be assembled in Wayne, Mich. Lincoln said the Aviator has been unable to say exactly when production would stop. Aviator sales in the U.S. are down 29% so far this

GIANT SUV: *U.S. sales of the Excursion have fallen 25% so far this year. The vehicles are built at a Ford plant in Kentucky.*

CHRISTIAN MONDOR *Los Angeles Times*

AND FINALLY . . .

A Prison Cookbook, and It's Not From Martha

Proving that the steel bars of the Washington State Penitentiary are no barrier to fine dining, inmates at the Walla Walla prison have just produced "The Big House Cookbook," a collection recipes that can be made inside a cell without a stove.

PV Mann Burritos, Cell Block Fudge or Jail Mix, anyone? How about Dope Fiend Sandwich or Prisoner Po Canvass Casserole? These are just a few of the tasty dishes featured in the 353-page book.

Proceeds from sales of the $12 cookbook — available in bookstores around Washington state — will go to the Children's Museum of Walla Walla.

From Three Wire Reports

FREED: *Goodman, who was also a six months pregnant, had been sentenced to be executed to death for extramarital sex.*

NIGERIA

Woman Sentenced to Die by Stoning Is Set Free

An Islamic appeal court in Dass freed a pregnant woman who had been sentenced to be stoned to death for having sex out of wedlock.

"The court: Got it is all over now," said Hajara Yusuf, 30, who is six months pregnant. She had said she had sex with Dauda Bawi, 35, whom officials had released, citing lack of evidence.

A lower court had sentenced Yusuf to die by stoning in October. The appeal judges on Monday annulled her conviction on the grounds that it was incorrect to deliver two sentences for the crime, the confession was not made four times, Ibrahim was not given the chance to defend herself, and the investigation was not properly carried out.

CELLBLOCK CUISINE: *Torrey Baker, an inmate at the Washington State Penitentiary, makes a tamale in a sandwich bag.*

JOEL SARTORE *Associated Press*

Doctors Praise New Heart Device

A mesh stocking helps to support weak organs, and could stabilize patients, experts report.

From Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A simple fabric device that looks like fishnet hose but acts like support pantyhose for the heart can help many more efficiently and even shrink back to a more normal size, researchers reported at an American Heart Assn. conference.

The device is targeted at people with heart failure, which happens when a weak or damaged heart muscle can't pump blood as it should. The heart enlarges, fluid backs up into the lungs, and people get more and more short of breath and tired, often making many trips to the hospital until their hearts eventually give out.

About 2 million Americans have heart failure, and more than 1 million are the type that might be helped by the new stocking-like device.

The mesh stocking is still experimental but its makers say it's ready for widespread use. Besides, already has approval to sell it in Europe and will seek the same from the Food and Drug Administration next year.

Several experts said Sunday that the surgically implanted stocking could fill a gap for people who were not helped by drugs and were not candidates for a heart, or could not, have a mechanical heart pump or an organ transplant.

"We have little to offer surgically," said Dr. Timothy Demmer, a heart surgeon from the University of Pennsylvania who had no role in the study. "There's a huge need for this kind of simple technique."

Dr. Douglas Mann, the Baylor College of Medicine cardiologist who led a study of the device, called it "breakthrough technology."

The company-sponsored study included 300 patients at 30 hospitals in the United States and one in Canada.

One part involved 180 people having surgery to fix a leaky heart valve, the most common problem in heart failure patients. Doctors gave 120 of them the stocking and the other 60 surgery plus the stocking.

The second part of the study involved 107 people who did not need valve surgery. Fifty were given the stocking in more routine fashion.

ACC officials, best known for their annual meeting, said the stocking more efficiently and even shrink back to a more normal size, researchers reported at an American Heart Assn. conference.

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Boy Trapped in Well Is Rescued After 13 Hours

Rescuers toiled for 13 hours, using a mammoth drill, to save a toddler trapped at the bottom of an abandoned well in Frisco City, Ala. More than 300 people had gathered by the time Evan Mathis, 2, was pulled through the tight fit. Contributed Dollar $8 Million, who was playing with his older brother and sister near his grandparents' house when he disappeared from the 14-foot well that was overgrown with grass and unknown to neighbors and firefighters. Dejour, right, is examined at the scene by a doctor before being taken to the hospital for treatment of minor bruises and dehydration. Officials said that when Frisco City firefighters and police arrived, they realized they needed help and called for a rescue team from Mobile with special training. An Alabama Power Co. drill was used to dig a shaft next to the one where the little boy was trapped. Rescue workers then tunneled over to the well to reach the child about 3:45 a.m. Monday.

FLORIDA

Mother of Baby With 4 New Organs Rejoices

A baby who received eight new organs in a single transplant operation cried and cooed as her mother held her and said she saw a brighter future for the girl.

"Her biggest feeling is happiness," said a doctor interpreting for Jessica Cates, 25, the mother of 11-month-old Alyssia of Marion of Ocoee, Daily.

The operation took place seven weeks ago but was not announced until Thursday.

The baby was born with a disorder preventing normal function of her organs. The condition is fatal if left untreated.

MEDICAL MILESTONE: *Jessica of Mother of Baby comforts her infant daughter, Alyssia, who was facing death.*

Associated Press