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World's oldest living organism may lie under Michigan forest

By John Flecher

The Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. — It sounds like one of those late-night, R movies: "Attack of the Giant Fungus!"

And what folks in upper Michigan first heard about it, many thought it was an April Fool's joke.

But scientists aren't laughing about the discovery of what may be the world's largest and oldest living organism, covering 38 acres beneath a forest near the Wisconsin line.

It's believed to be 1,500 to 10,000 years old and weigh about 100 tons — about the same as an adult blue whale.

"Without organisms such as this, it wouldn't take long before life on Earth would cease," Johann N. Bruhn, a research scientist with Michigan Technological University in Houghton, said yesterday.

The fungus is an integral part of the ecosystem, feeding on decayed wood and producing carbon dioxide essential for plant life. Plants take in the carbon dioxide and give off life-giving oxygen.

Bruhn wrote an article about the gigantic fungus in this week's issue of the journal Nature with Myron L. Smith and James B. Anderson, both of the University of Toronto. They discovered the fungus while doing research for the U.S. Navy in 1988.

After the article was made public Wednesday, the scientists were deluged with inquiries from the United States, Canada and Britain. Some people sought information from semised state and local officials.

"We've been getting calls since it came on the news this morning," Marge Bures, a technician with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, said yesterday. "It was just what I needed to know something about it."

Over at the Iron County Chamber of Commerce, manager Luis Goresky also was taken aback.

"I heard about it on the late news and I thought, 'Oh, someone's playing an April Fool's prank,'" she said by telephone.

But she couldn't resist pondering the natural wonder's commercial utility. The tourism industry is second only to logging in the county, where the biggest town is Iron River, population 2,095. Its thick forests

and gently rolling hills team with deer and other wildlife.

Goresky said the fungus could become Iron County's answer to the "Mystery Light," a nocturnal glow in a swampy area 50 miles west. Theories on its cause range from the scientific to the supernatural.

Every year, hikers descend by the Chamber of Commerce seeking directions to the Mystery Light, she said. "I can foresee this fungus becoming the same thing. It's for real."

But Bruhn said tourists would be disappointed if they tried to see the giant fungus. It's all underground except for the comparatively tiny fibrous stalks that poke through the surface in the fall — cables commonly

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Harding's execution put on hold

Battle now goes to U.S. high court

By Chris Limberis

The Arizona Daily Star

Multiple murderer Don Eugene Harding, scheduled to die in Arizona's gas chamber Monday morning, was granted a stay just night by a 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel.

Harding, 43, sentenced to death in 1982 for the slayings of two businessmen in a Tucson motel, is not assured a permanent or lengthy reprieve from the execution set for 12:05 a.m. at the state prison in Florence.

Assistant to Attorney General Grant Woods is seeking to have the stay vacated by the U.S. Supreme Court.

A spokesman for Woods said last night that the Attorney General's Office "faces an uphill battle" to get the stay overturned to allow Harding to be executed.

Jack Roberts, the assistant attorney general who has long argued that Harding should be executed, anticipated the stay and prepared briefs for the Supreme Court even before Harding's appeal was denied by U.S. District Judge Alfredo C. Marquez on Wednesday.

Deane Young and James Belanger, Harding's lawyers from the Arizona Capital Representation Project, could not be reached last night.

The three-judge panel, which ordered the stay, is made up of Judges

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Auto law sparks furor, blockade in Nogales, Son.

By Laura Brooks

The Arizona Daily Star

NOGALES, Sonora — Enraged motorists repeatedly blocked traffic at the Grand Avenue port of entry yesterday to protest a sudden change in rules for visitors entering Mexico.

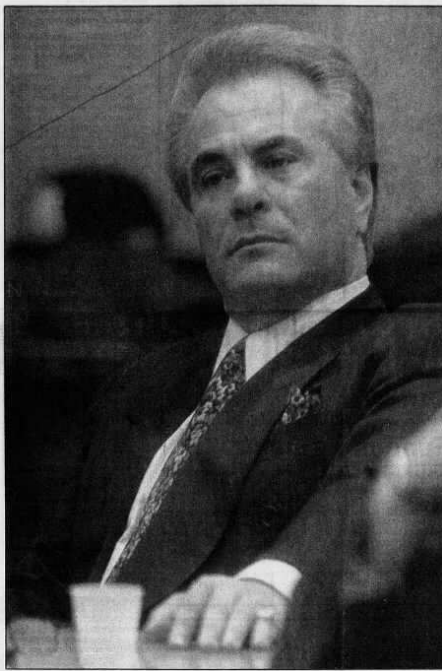
After the third blockade on the Mexican side of the border, U.S. lawmen last night set up barriers one block from the gateway and at about 9 p.m. began rerouting southbound travelers to the Mariposa Road border crossing. Mariposa is normally closed at 9 p.m., but officials said they would keep the entry open until midnight as an emergency measure.

"We'll be here until it ends, and that could be tomorrow," said Sgt. Manuel Lopez of the Nogales Police Department, adding that about 55 local and federal lawmen were involved in the operation.

About 150 travelers on the Mexican side used their vehicles and bodies to block northbound and southbound traffic yesterday. Earlier, protesters twice briefly stopped border traffic, but were persuaded to disperse by Mexican customs agents who told them they were negotiating with officials in Mexico City for a solution.

As of about 10 p.m. the situation was calm, with no serious injuries reported. Earlier, one man was

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Mob boss John Gotti, "The Dapper Don," finally loses a round in his battle with the government

Murder charges stick like 'Teflon Don'

Mafia boss John Gotti convicted of five Gambino mobster killings

By Ronald Powers

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — John Gotti, the brash Mafia boss who blasted his way to the top of the nation's most powerful crime family, was convicted yesterday of racketeering and murder charges. He faces a life sentence.

"It'll be OK," Gotti told supporters after listening to the jury forewoman announce "guilty" on all 13 counts. His top lieutenant also was convicted.

The U.S. District Court jury decided the mob boss had murdered five of his associates in the Gambino crime family.

The stunning verdict, after just 13 hours of deliberations, crowned the government's six-year crusade to put the "Teflon Don" behind bars.

Three times since 1986, Gotti had beaten charges against him.

This time, Gotti, 51, was done in by his own voice and the testimony of once-trusted underboss Salvatore "Sammy Bull" Gravano. Gotti was heard on hours of secretly recorded tapes, openly discussing murder and other Mafia business.

"The Teflon is gone. The don is covered with Velcro, and all the charges stick," said James Fox, special agent in charge of the FBI's New York office.

Gravano, who admitted on the stand to 10 at Gotti's direction and provided a chilling narrative of the killings that boosted Gotti from capo to mob boss.

Just before the jury forewoman read the verdict, Gotti was smiling confidently. He showed no reaction as she began announcing "guilty."

At one point, Gotti — impeccably as usual — in a casual double

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AT A GLANCE

NEW YORK (AP) — The key points and participants in the federal murder-racketeering trial of mob boss John Gotti.

Defendants: Gambino crime-family boss John Gotti and underboss Frank Losacchio.

Charges: Racketeering, murder, murder conspiracy, illegal gambling, loansharking, obstruction of justice, bribery of a public official and tax fraud.

The stakes: Gotti faces a maximum of three life sentences and 105 years in prison. Losacchio faces one life sentence and 70 years.

Setting: District Court in Brooklyn.

The judge: Leo Guesser.

Prosecutors: Andrew J. Maloney, the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and four assistant U.S. attorneys: John Giessens, Laura A. Ward, Patrick J. Cotter and James Brennan.

Defense lawyers: For Gotti, Albert J. Krieger; For Losacchio, Anthony Caronella.

Prosecution argument: Gotti orchestrated the murder of former Gambino boss Paul Castellano to seize control of the crime family; Gotti and Losacchio ordered other slayings while directing the crime syndicate's loansharking, gambling and other illegal operations.

Defense argument: The government misinterpreted Gotti's taped conversations and used the testimony of witnesses who are lying to convict two innocent men.

The key witness: Salvatore "Sammy Bull" Gravano, Gotti's former right-hand man, who admitted to 19 murders during his testimony March 2-13.

U.S. inquiry finds 'no evidence' of Israeli arms leaks

By George Godda

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A U.S. investigation team returned from Israel with "no evidence" to support allegations that Israel had secretly transferred a U.S. Patriot missile or its technology to China, the State Department said yesterday.

"We consider the matter closed," State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said.

But she remained silent about the department's thinking on a newly released official study that said a major recipient of U.S. weaponry — Israel — has been transferring some equipment to third countries without authorization for Israel.

The report, released Wednesday, was prepared by the State Department.

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WEATHER

Cloudy, warmer. Today is expected to be warmer and partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers. Look for a high of 69 to 74 and an overnight low of 44 to 48. Yesterday's high was 64, and the low 44. Details on Page 15A.

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Embassies in Tripoli attacked; Security Council blames Gadhafi

By Neila Sammakia

The Associated Press

TRIPOLI, Libya — Young Libyans with firebombs sacked the Venezuelan Embassy and tried to storm the Russian mission yesterday during a day of protests against countries that supported U.N. air and arms embargo on Libya.

The U.N. Security Council, in emergency session, demanded that Libya pay for damage to the embassies and laid blame for the attacks on Col. Muammar Gadhafi.

"This is so transparently and obviously directed to bring pressure on members of the Security Council," said Thomas R. Pickering, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Women and schoolgirls carried white flowers to the embassies of India and Morocco, two of the five U.N. Security Council members that

impose sanctions on Libya.

Hundreds of students smashed furniture and ripped up the garden at the Venezuelan mission. Others tried to break into the Russian Embassy and destroyed four cars, then burned a Russian flag on the ambassador's limousine when they were turned back.

Rocks were thrown at the Austrian mission and boisterous protests were held outside the Belgian, British and Italian embassies.

Despite the violence, there were no mass attempts by foreigners to leave the country. Many Western countries, including the United States, had warned their citizens in recent weeks to leave Libya.

Diplomats said they thought the demonstrations were orchestrated, possibly by revolutionary committees loyal to Gadhafi. With the intense police activity in Libya, it was

unlikely the demonstrations could have occurred spontaneously, they said.

Many protesters arrived in bachelors' and police reinforcements turned up early at several targeted embassies.

"We didn't ask for protection," said Austrian Ambassador Wilfried Almböckner. "They just came."

At the Russian Embassy, however, police arrived 15 minutes late, diplomats said.

"They just watched it unfold," said Agh Baban, the Russian first secretary.

The official Libyan news agency JANA said dozens of demonstrators were hospitalized after clashes with riot police. Western diplomats said they had no reports of any injuries.

The sanctions were imposed on Libya after it refused to surrender

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