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David Carpenter, left, showed no emotion as first-degree murder verdicts were read.

Carpenter convicted of murders

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SAN DIEGO — David J. Carpenter — already sentenced to die for a pair of Santa Cruz County murders — was convicted Tuesday of first-degree murder in the killings of five hikers in Northern California parks.

The killings were part of the "trailside slayings" that terrorized the region eight years ago.

The Superior Court jury returned the verdict against Carpenter, 58, at the end of its second day of deliberations.

"That's an awful quick verdict in this case," Marin County Deputy District Attorney John Posey said. "It certainly seems to suggest they didn't buy anything the defense presented."

A penalty phase to determine whether Carpenter should be executed or spend the rest of his life in prison will begin next Tuesday in the same courtroom.

"It came as a surprise to have an unfavorable verdict as fast as this," said Marin County Public Defender Frank Cox. "(Carpenter) is philosophical about it. He's optimistic that the penalty phase will be a good one ... but he's very disappointed."

Carpenter was convicted by the San Diego jury for the 1980 murders, which occurred in two parks in Marin County — Point Reyes National Seashore and Mount Tamalpais State Park.

He already has been convicted and sentenced to the gas chamber for two related 1981 murders in Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Felton.

The prosecution's case stemmed from a subsequent Santa Cruz County trailside slaying. Carpenter's automatic appeal in the local case is pending before the state Supreme Court.

Jurors were not told about Carpenter's previous conviction for the March 29, 1981, murder of Ellen Hansen, 20, of Davis. Her boyfriend, Steven Haertle, survived the attack to identify Carpenter as the gunman in both trials. A second woman also was murdered in a separate attack in Henry Cowell park.

In the Marin County case, Carpenter was charged with murdering Richard Stowers, 19, of Petaluma, and his fiancée, Cynthia Moreland, 18, of Cotati, on Oct. 11, 1980; Anne Alderson, 26, of San Rafael, on Oct. 13, 1980; and Diane O'Connell, 22, of San Jose, and Shauna May, 23, of San Francisco, on Nov. 28, 1980.

The killing spree left many popular hiking trails and parks in Northern California virtually deserted

until Carpenter's arrest in San Francisco in May 1981.

The San Diego jury also convicted Carpenter of raping two of his Marin victims and trying to rape a third.

Jurors found true the special-circumstances allegations of murder during the commission of felonies, relating to the sexual-assault allegations, as well as multiple killings. The findings mean Carpenter could receive the death penalty a second time.

Carpenter, who spent eight days on the stand testifying in his own defense, showed no visible emotion as Superior Court Judge Herbert B. Hoffman read the verdict.

In his testimony, Carpenter had claimed he was miles away from the crime scenes when the killings occurred.

More than 500 items were entered into evidence, and 91 witnesses testified during Carpenter's four-month trial, which was held in San Diego because of heavy publicity about the case in Northern California.

Defense attorneys argued Carpenter deserved acquittal because of "serious doubts" created by what they termed questionable police procedures and inconsistencies in the testimony of witnesses linking Carpenter to the undisputed murder weapon.

The prosecution, however, contended Carpenter was a cold-blooded killer whose "ultimate goal" was to commit murder and rape and get away with it.

Ballistics evidence presented by state Department of Justice criminalist Richard Waller showed each victim was killed by a .38-caliber bullet fired from the same weapon. His serology and blood-typing tests on the rape victims and the defendant also could not exclude Carpenter as their assailant.