

Local



Trailside Murders

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Both sides rest cases in Trailside trial

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The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Both sides rested their cases Thursday in the Trailside Slayings trial after the prosecution called a final witness to buttress its contention that one victim was raped just before she was slain.

The sex-slaying allegation is one of several "special circumstances" that could send David Carpenter, 53, to the gas chamber if he is convicted of murder in the notorious Northern California killings. Carpenter already has served 17 years in prison for attempted murder, rape and robbery and kidnapping.

Dr. Richard T. Mason of the Santa Cruz County coroner's office displayed slides Thursday to rebut defense testimony that

sperm found in the body of Heather Scaggs, one of the murder victims, was deposited 24 hours to 36 hours before her death.

The magnified slides were compared with slides of samples taken directly from donors and slides of sperm diluted with various fluids. The comparison was designed to show jurors the sperm in Ms. Scaggs' body was not greatly diluted. This would support the prosecution theory that the sperm entered her body shortly before death.

Carpenter is charged with raping and killing Ms. Scaggs, 20. He also is charged with murdering and attempting to rape Ellen Marie Hansen, 20, and with the attempted murder of Steven Haertle, then 20, in Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park on March 29, 1981.

Ms. Scaggs' body was found in Big Basin State Park in Santa Cruz County on May 26, 1981. She had been dead for about three weeks, and the analysis of fluids found in her body was complicated by the decayed state of her body, which had also been damaged by animals.

Defense attorney Larry Biggam unsuccessfully tried to have the report of a prosecution serologist, Dr. Ed Blake, admitted into evidence Thursday. Blake examined sperm samples from Ms. Scaggs' body and offered the opinion the semen was in her body for 24 hours to 36 hours before her death.

A defense witness testified last week that it was his estimate that the semen was in her body for 24 to 36 hours before her death, which, defense attorneys say,

indicates she was not raped before she was killed.

Carpenter is being tried in Los Angeles County because of pretrial publicity in Northern California. The case is being heard by two juries. One will decide on guilt or innocence and a second will decide between life imprisonment and the death penalty if he is found guilty.

Superior Court Judge Dion Morrow told jurors that closing arguments are expected Monday. If Carpenter is found guilty of special circumstances the penalty phase jury will return on August 15 to hear testimony on whether he should receive the death penalty.

Carpenter is also charged with five 1980 trailside murders in Marin County. Those charges have not yet been set for trial.