

Biologists Seek Whale Answer

MAYPORT, Fla. (UPI) — A centuries-old sea mystery confronted marine biologists again today on a lonely three-mile stretch of sand studded with the carcasses of more than 100 pilot whales.

Why do whales commit mass suicide by hurling themselves onto beaches, repeating their death surge to shore even when hauled back to deep water by human rescuers?

"One day man will find the answer," said Cecil M. Walker, assistant general manager of Marineland, as he tape-measured a 16 foot, 8 inch bull. "That's what we're out here for."

About 150 pilot whales beached themselves in Fort George Inlet in follow the leader fashion Sunday and Monday.

About 100 volunteers spent

most of the day Monday pushing, pulling and even carrying some of the sea mammals on makeshift stretchers into deeper water.

Lt. Glen Keefer of the Florida Marine Patrol said the volunteers "formed a human fence between the animals and the shore."

"About halfway out, all 40 of them (still alive) went up on the beach," said University of Florida marine biologist Blair Irvine. "But we pushed them back into the water in time. Eventually we got them out to the surf line."

While the volunteers kept pushing the weakened mammals away from the shore, two Marine Patrol boats herded the whales "like yapping sheep dogs" toward a 65-foot-wide passage to the sea, Irvine said.

"No more than 30 went through the passage," Irvine said. "The tide was ebbing and they were sucked out to sea by the current. About 10 of them became frightened by the surf and beached themselves."

Sgt. Willard Patrick of the Marine Patrol said that as of 6 p.m. Monday there were no whales still alive inside the three-mile-wide inlet.

Guards were posted along the beach to the keep away the curious. One man received a summons when he was "caught in the act" of severing a whale's head, a second degree misdemeanor under Florida law. Whale teeth are prized as jewelry.

Officials said they probably would bury the carcasses at a nearby landfill.

Among the possible explanations advanced by scientists for the whales' behavior was that their directional sonar, which steers them clear of danger, somehow went awry.

"We found parasites in the inner ears of some of them," Irvine said. "This may have disoriented them and, since the pilot whale has a social nature, the others followed."

Candidate Is Speaker

David J. Brightbill, an announced candidate for Lebanon County district attorney, will be guest speaker for a meeting of the Young Republicans of Lebanon County today at 8 p.m. in the Lincoln Republican Club.

Following his talk, Brightbill will conduct a question and answer session. Richard Shay, who has announced his candidacy for city council, will be on hand for the session, also. Members and other interested persons are invited to attend.

It was also announced state Sen. Henry Hager, 23rd District, will be the featured speaker for the annual Young Republican dinner on May 6.

Charges Filed

Drunk driving charges were filed this morning against Ronald Lee Simpson, 22, 1436 Cedar St., Annville. He was apprehended at 9:52 Monday night at Walnut and Mill streets by N. Cornwall-W. Lebanon Twp. police.