

U. of Idaho Reports Birth of Cloned Mule

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS, Associated Press Writer

SPOKANE - Two weeks after announcing the birth of the first cloned mule, the same research team said a second cloned mule with identical DNA has been born.

The mule, named Utah Pioneer, was born natural and unassisted Monday morning. The male foal joined his brother, Idaho Gem, whose birth was announced May 29, as the only equine clones in the world. The clones are the result of work by researchers Gordon Woods and Dirk Vanderwall from the University of Idaho and Ken White from Utah State University.

Both cloned foals are siblings of Taz, a champion racing mule owned by Idaho businessman and mule enthusiast Don Jacklin of Post Falls, Idaho. The foals carry identical DNA from a fetal skin cell culture established five years ago at UI with Taz's mother and father.

Utah Pioneer weighed 78 pounds at birth, and "is healthy and already very active," Woods said in a news release.

The cloning team will again submit samples to a University of California Davis laboratory for independent verification, as was done with Idaho Gem.

"He's a male mule, and he looks like Idaho Gem," Woods said.

Preliminary testing last year showed the method developed by the researchers to clone a mule should work equally well with a horse, something Woods said he plans to do.

"This is an important birth because it provides repeatability to the project and strengthens the results," White said.

The May 4 birth of Idaho Gem, announced by Science magazine May 29, added mules to the barnyard of cloned animals that already included sheep, cows, pigs, cats and rodents.

Mules are bred by mating a male donkey with a female horse. The breeding success is about the same as among horses alone.

To clone the racing mule's brother, researchers bred Taz's parents, a jack donkey and a horse mare, and allowed the resulting fetus to grow for 45 days. This provided the DNA needed for the clone.

The researchers then harvested eggs from horse mares. After removing the nucleus from each egg, the researchers inserted the DNA from the male fetal cells. The eggs were then placed into the wombs of female horses.

Of 307 attempts, there were 21 pregnancies and three carried to full term. The third cloned mule is due in August.

Jacklin paid \$400,000 to finance the four-year mule cloning project.

