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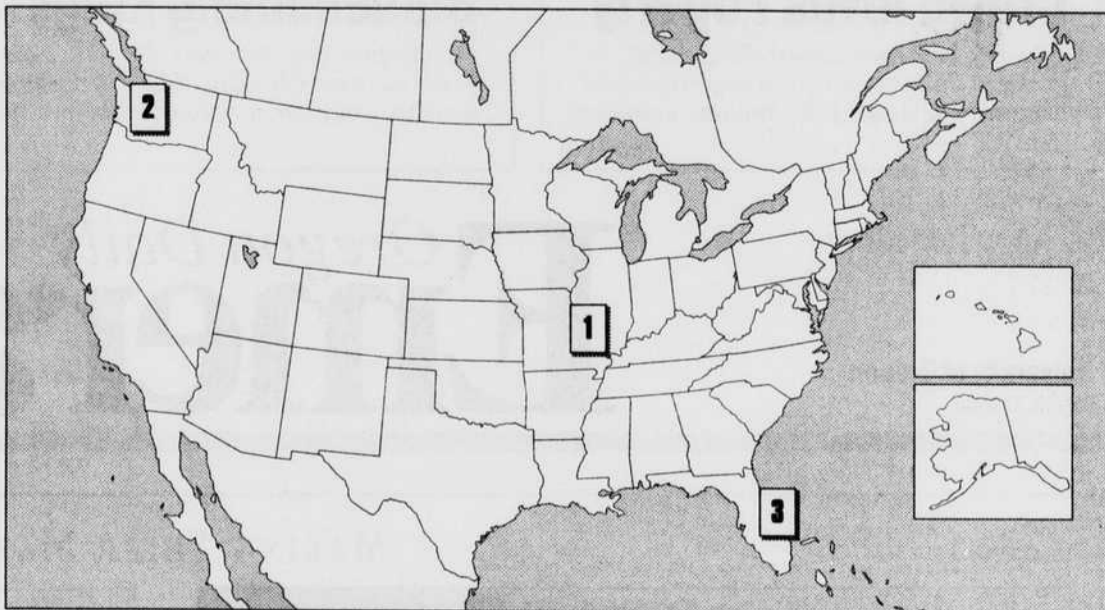
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Balloonist part way to circumnavigation goal

1 ST. LOUIS — Adventurer Steve Fossett sailed high over the Indian Ocean on Wednesday, one-third of the way to his goal of becoming the first person to fly a balloon nonstop around the world.

However, he had to drop his combination hot air and helium balloon to a lower altitude to avoid calm weather that could end his flight.

By early afternoon, the Chicago millionaire and his Solo Spirit balloon were 820 miles southeast of Madagascar, flying east over the Indian Ocean at 74 mph, according to his control center at Washington University in St. Louis. He had traveled 7,800 miles from his starting point in Argentina.

Fossett's control center said he was on track toward Australia but might be in danger of getting caught in a high-pressure zone.

"The high-pressure zone means really good weather, with no winds," said mission control spokeswoman Marie Finkelman.

New software patch blocks security hole

2 REDMOND, Wash. — Microsoft Corp. has released new software patches to fix a security flaw in its Outlook Express and Outlook 98's electronic mail capability while at the same time warning of e-mail attachments claiming to be the patch.

The flaw — also present in Netscape Communications Corp.'s current Web browser, Communicator — allows any outsider to send a booby-trapped message capable of executing nasty commands such as erasing a computer's hard drive.

Microsoft's new patches include the fixes first offered July 27, while also addressing a new variant on the problem.

But the company on Wednesday also warned that someone has e-mailed users an attachment that claims to be the patch but isn't. The company said the file is not valid and should not be installed. It said only patches downloaded from the Microsoft Web site should be used.

Air Force Titan rocket explodes after launch

3 CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — An Air Force rocket carrying a classified military spy satellite exploded shortly after liftoff today. No one was injured.

The giant Titan 4 rocket split apart 42 seconds into flight, showering debris over the Atlantic Ocean. Until then, everything appeared to be normal.

"Oh, no," the launch commentator muttered as the rocket blew up. "It appears that we've had a malfunction of the vehicle."

The 20-story Titan 4, powered by solid-fuel boosters similar to those on NASA's space shuttle, is the largest unmanned rocket in the United States. It was hoisting a secret satellite for the National Reconnaissance Office that reportedly cost \$1 billion. The loss of the rocket and the cost of the launch swelled the total loss today by an additional \$200 million or more.

Journalists and guests watching from three to four miles away were rushed onto buses and evacuated when the rocket shattered.

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