



Physical Anthropology Section – 2007

H109 Bones of Contention - The Investigation of a Cadaver Dog Handler

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand methods to process and compare large scale cases involving numerous submissions (over 2700 bones were submitted). They will also learn about a significant case that affected many in the forensic community.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by showing the importance of testing and certification for all dog handlers working for law enforcement organizations. It will also emphasize the importance of creating formalized training programs which will utilize law enforcement personnel from within police agencies as canine handlers rather than relying on private individuals who cannot be closely regulated. This case and presentation may impact the way that all dog handlers interact with the forensic community in the future.

This presentation will discuss the investigation of a well known cadaver dog handler who was accused of planting bones and other evidence at various crime scenes. The suspect in the case had provided her services to state, local, and federal law enforcement organizations all across the United States and in other countries for many years working on hundreds of cases. She and her K-9 companion were renowned for finding skeletal material, blood, and other human materials even when those who had searched before her had come up empty handed.

Over the years, several individuals from various law enforcement organizations believed they saw the handler throw down skeletal materials at crime scenes; however, nothing was ever proven and they themselves often dismissed it by thinking that they just misunderstood her actions. Eventually, the handler went out on a crime scene search in Michigan to look for the body of a missing girl. The search resulted in the handler finding fourteen human bones, which were eventually submitted to the FBI Laboratory for mitochondrial DNA analysis. Four of the bones were selected randomly for examination. All four of the bones were determined to have different mitochondrial DNA types, and all of them were different than the type of the victim. At this point, it was still unclear if the handler was involved in any suspicious activity. Authorities may have stumbled across the dumping ground of a serial killer, and if this was the case, a more thorough search of the area needed to take place. A second search was conducted using the same dog handler; and this time, a forensic examiner from the crime laboratory witnessed her pulling a bone from her sock and plunging it into a creek bed. This launched a large-scale investigation of the handler which involved the cooperation of many different police and governmental agencies. Everyone that the handler had conducted searches for in the past was contacted, and items of evidence that she had recovered at crime scenes were sent in to the FBI Laboratory for examination and comparison to bones and other human material found in the handler's residence and vehicle. The handler had gotten human materials from many different individuals such as dentists, medical examiners, anthropologists, and other dog handlers. She had also given human materials to many other cadaver dog handlers. All of these people were questioned, and materials associated to the handler being investigated were obtained for comparison to skeletal material found on the various searches she conducted. In total, well over 2700 items of evidence were submitted to the laboratory for examination which required a joint effort utilizing anthropology, trace evidence, mitochondrial DNA and nuclear DNA to analyze and compare the materials.

A detailed discussion of the events leading up to the investigation, the analysis of the evidence submitted in the case, the laboratory findings, and the eventual outcome of the investigation will all be presented.

Bones, Dog, Cadaver