



### D23 An Interdisciplinary and Community Approach to the Identification of Clandestine Mass Graves: The McGill University - Parc Safari Project

*Andre Costopoulos, PhD\*, Department of Anthropology, McGill University, Room 718, Leacock Building, 855 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, H3A 2T7, CANADA; Margaret Kalacska, PhD, Department of Geography, McGill University, Montreal, H3A-2K6, CANADA; Neha Gupta, MSc, and Colin Nielsen, MSc, Department of Anthropology, McGill University, Room 718, Leacock Building, 855 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, H3A 2T7, CANADA; Frederic Megret, PhD, Faculty of Law, McGill University, Montreal, H3A 1X1, CANADA; Carrie Herzog, Burnside Hall, 805 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, H3A 2K6, CANADA; and Samuel F. Algozin, JD, 5633 Waverly, Montreal, H2T 2Y2, CANADA*

After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand how to structure a large mass grave identification project that is interdisciplinary and features a community participation component and collaborations with private enterprise.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by making three main contributions with the help of scholars of a number of disciplines, of private enterprise partners, and of local community members, the project will develop, refine, and test methods for the location of mass graves. It increases knowledge of how mass graves modify a pre-existing built landscape, and it helps identify ways in which local traditions reflect the presence of graves. A non-negligible benefit of the project is that it shows how academics, private enterprise, and local community members can cooperate to each reach their own objectives and at the same time produce knowledge critical to addressing a serious human rights-related issue.

For the past year, archaeologists, remote sensors, geologists, wetland scientists, legal scholars, representatives from private enterprise and local community members have been collaborating to develop innovative ways of locating clandestine mass graves and identifying and solving the main challenges involved. In September 2007, the zoological director of an African animal park located near Montreal, Canada, contacted the Anthropology Department at McGill University to explore the possibility of recovering animal skeletons from the park's cemetery to create educational exhibits. The Parc has been in operation for nearly 40 years, but due to a recent change in ownership and administration, the cemetery is almost entirely undocumented. Even its spatial extent is currently uncertain. The land on which the cemetery stands no longer belongs to the park, but is owned by a local farming family.

The McGill Anthropology Department began using the cemetery as the location of its archaeological field methods course. Members of the Geography Department working on the question of clandestine mass graves in genocide and war crimes contexts soon added themselves to the team and started using the cemetery to test new methods for locating graves using a mix of remote and onsite sensing. Scholars from the McGill Faculty of Law are now participating in the project.

The cemetery is currently a mix of graves in various stages of archaeological documentation, some of them being merely identified through test-pitting or surface visible remains, others being partially or fully excavated, others still being excavated and their remains studied and processed in the laboratory, and reassembled as exhibits. The remote and onsite sensing researchers on the team have a ready made experimental situation in which to develop and test methods for the identification of graves of various types, from individual to mass graves. They have known graves on which to develop and refine methods, and a large area (< 1 acre) of possible or suspected graves on which to test those methods. Over time, the archaeologists are using excavation to test the predictions of the remote and onsite sensing researchers as to the location and nature of graves, and the extent of the cemetery.

Because the park has been a major feature of the local community, and a major employer for over a generation, there is considerable local oral tradition about the park and its cemetery. There is also limited institutional memory at the park itself about what is in the cemetery and where. These local stories are being recorded and compared with the results of excavation and sensing in order to determine in what ways they relate to the actual material record. There has been considerable community interest in the project. The archaeological survey of the suspected extent of the cemetery and surrounding areas has also turned up significant historical remains dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, some of which are co-mingled with documented animal graves. The project is therefore producing a record of how later events modify and mix with earlier remains and how they are perceived locally and integrated into local traditions.

#### **Mass Graves, Interdisciplinary, Community Based Approaches**