



### **F23 A Toddler's Remains Discovered: Science vs. Opinion vs. Hearsay — A Cold Case Reinvestigated**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the necessity of constructively filtering hearsay in an investigation. In addition, the results of accepted scientific testing should supersede personal subjective opinion, but subjective opinion can necessitate further studies.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illuminating the fact that present forensic science knowledge is not able to answer every question that appears regarding human decomposition.

On the opening day of hunting season, October 15, 1988, two hunters discovered the skull of a child wedged in the crevice of a sandstone cliff in a remote area of the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains approximately 16 miles northeast of Greybull, Wyoming.

The authorities who were notified included the Big Horn County Sheriff and Coroner, who were part of an investigative team that went to the site to collect the remains. Both the Sheriff and Coroner reported smelling the odor of decomposing human flesh. The team recovered the fairly intact skull, although the zygomatic arches were missing bilaterally. Additionally, several long bones were found resting in a mass of what appeared to be adipose tissue. A leather strap, animal fur (antelope or deer), a piece of white loosely woven gauze cloth, and a flat piece of metal, which initially appeared to be a baby's spoon, were also recovered with the remains.

A noted anthropologist from the University of Wyoming was asked to examine the remains after their discovery. He was under the assumption that, from their condition, the remains were of recent origin, having only been at that location from a few months to a few years. Of particular concern was the apparent force which was used to push the body into the crevice, thus detaching the cheek bones.

Identification of the victim was impossible at that time. Therefore, the remains were separately placed in Zip-loc<sup>®</sup> bags and buried in a casket in an unmarked grave at a local cemetery. Interestingly, a local woman visited the grave after the burial.

In 2009, a court order allowed the remains to be exhumed for further analysis. Unfortunately, it was discovered that the seal of the casket, as well as the seals of the Zip-locs<sup>®</sup> had been breached by 20 years of groundwater, severely deteriorating the bones included in the remains.

The rumor from 1988 until present time was that a transient couple, living in a trailer home within a mile of the victim's discovery, "arrived with two children and left with only one." Many peculiar behaviors of the family were reported during the investigation.

A coroner's inquest was opened regarding the case. Birth records were collected, registered sex offenders were interviewed, local citizens with knowledge of the incident were questioned, the lady who visited the unmarked grave was contacted, all historical records of oil production in that area at the time were obtained, DNA analysis was attempted on the unerupted teeth in the skull, and seemingly no stone was left unturned. The skull was sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to have a facial reconstruction completed. A primary incisor was delivered to the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio Dental School for analysis.

The investigative panel lost its support from the Big Horn County Sheriff's Department. The Wyoming Department of Criminal Investigation intervened and became the guidance for the panel, financially and from the aspect of law enforcement. Radiocarbon dating was conducted on the remaining long bones at the State's crime lab, leading to a rather surprising answer as to the identity of the victim.

This presentation will provide details of the investigation, which included an archaeological dig at the site of the victim's location, as well as the findings of the inquiry, as well as the results of which have led to still-unanswered questions in this query.

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#### **Cold Case, Hearsay, Investigation**