



E122 Forensic Archaeology and Search Strategies for Clandestine Burials: Geographic Profiling in Reverse and “Winthroping”

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand how geographic profiling and “winthroping” may be useful tools for clandestine burial searches. This presentation will familiarize attendees with the basic principles of geographic profiling commonly used by law enforcement to locate an offender’s likely home base according to mapped patterns of their crime scenes. However, searches for clandestine burials need to be based upon geographic profiling patterns in reverse: the offenders’ home base (known or suspected), the victims’ home base, other related crime scenes as applicable, and the offenders’ habits to determine likely areas for a clandestine burial. Attendees will also be introduced to the concept of “winthroping,” which was originally developed by the military for the purpose of locating hidden munitions caches. Most clandestine burial searches are based upon tips, tracking offenders’ activities close to the disappearance date of a suspected victim, and general speculation combined with a hit-or-miss approach of volunteer groups who typically canvass areas around a victim’s last known whereabouts.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing involvement of forensic archaeologists’ skills in conjunction with adapted geographic profiling strategies that can aid in identifying possible burial locations. Forensic archaeologists have been taught as part of their academic training to recognize and understand spatial dynamics of built and natural environments and human and animal movement across those landscapes. It cannot be overstated that these skills can offer important insights that an untrained eye may miss in an outdoor crime scene. This presentation promotes the involvement of forensic archaeologists to participate before the actual excavation of a clandestine burial and encourages law enforcement to utilize their skills in the search phase. Many times, a homicide is suspected but a body has not been found. Locating a body is problematic without a confession, and oftentimes cases are severely disadvantaged when the victim is not found.

This presentation will demonstrate that geographic profiling, originally conceived of as a means to locate offenders, is a tool that may also be adapted to focus on patterns and choices to find burials. This presentation will explore how an offender’s environment and relationship (or lack thereof) to a victim also influences choices for clandestine burial sites.

There is unique value in combining forensic archaeological skills with understanding multivariate landscapes in criminal activities, human connection to those landscapes, and consideration of unconscious and habitual behavior patterns toward identifying likely burial locations. Research on profiling in this context is currently very limited and this presentation is aimed at stimulating more exploration into, and development of, adapting and incorporating geographic profiles in conjunction with forensic archaeologists’ involvement in burial search strategies.

Forensic Archaeology, Geographic Profiling, Winthroping