

# Missing man's remains identified in Columbia County 24 years after he disappeared

Keith Bamford was 39 when he was reported missing by his mother in 1996. Remains were found in February 2002, but were not positively identified until June 2020.



*Credit: Columbia County Sheriff's Office*

Keith Bamford was 39 years old when his mother reported him missing in 1996. The Columbia County Sheriff's Office said remains found in 2002 have now been identified as Bamford.

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LAKE CITY, Fla. — Human remains discovered in Columbia County in 2002 have been identified as a man reported missing in 1996, 24 years after his disappearance.

Keith Bamford was 39 years old when his mother reported him missing on May 13, 1996, according to the [Columbia County Sheriff's Office](#). He was last seen leaving the Gateway Mental Health Facility on Michigan Street in Lake City around 11 a.m. that day.

Investigators searched areas around State Road 100, which was the most direct route from the Gateway Mental Health Facility to the Bamford family's home in Starke, CCSO said. A man matching Bamford's description was seen by a deputy around 1 p.m. the day he disappeared on SR 100 near the County Road 245 intersection, but Bamford was never found.

The sheriff's office sent photographs of Bamford to surrounding law enforcement agencies, along with his identifying characteristics in an attempt to find him. Investigators also collected DNA from family members, the sheriff's office said.

Detectives tried to develop new leads on Bamford's whereabouts through the years, but the case remained open, CCSO said.

Six years later, in February of 2002, a hunter in Lulu found a partial human skull. Columbia County deputies and Florida Department of Law Enforcement investigators searched the area and found additional human remains.

Nearly a year later, in January of 2003, the sheriff's office received a report from the C.A. Pound Human Identification Laboratory, which concluded that the bone was from a Black woman between the ages of 30 and 40. No evidence of trauma was discovered, and the remains were stored at the Medical Examiner's office in Jacksonville, CCSO said.

It wasn't until early 2019 that CCSO learned the remains had not been submitted to the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification, the sheriff's office said. They sent the remains in for DNA extraction and comparison to known missing person cases.

Because of the original assessment that the remains were of a Black woman between 30 and 40 years old, CCSO hoped the identification would help solve a different cold case of a young Black woman reported missing in 1988. But, in June of 2020, the UNT lab sent CCSO a report stating the bones actually belonged to a man, not a woman, and that all the remains submitted belonged to the same person, the sheriff's office said.

The report confirmed the DNA from the remains recovered in 2002 belonged to Bamford, CCSO said. The cause of death was not determined.

Bamford's family was notified of the identification.

"The Columbia County Sheriff's Office wants to express sympathy for the family of the loss of their loved one and we are happy to have been able to provide a bit of closure to the Bamford family," the sheriff's office said in a Facebook post.

source: <https://www.firstcoastnews.com/article/news/local/missing-mans-remains-identified-in-columbia-county-24-years-after-he-disappeared/77-ba593bd9-0733-425c-854a-e4436efeed2e>