

# DNA hit solves decade-old North Vancouver mystery

Human bones discovered near Mount Fromme almost 10 years ago have been identified this week as belonging to missing Thunder Bay, Ont. man Dante Ponzanetti. Ponzanetti, 20, was in Vancouver visiting his grandmother when he went missing in June, 2003.

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Human bones discovered near Mount Fromme almost 10 years ago have been identified this week as belonging to missing Thunder Bay, Ont. man Dante Ponzanetti.

Ponzanetti, 20, was in Vancouver visiting his grandmother when he went missing in June, 2003. More than a year later, a hiker

found ribs and a bone from a hand by Kennedy Lake "It was really surprising that we even got a profile out of those," said Bill Inkster, manager with the B.C. Coroners Service identification unit.

Three years after Ponzanetti went missing, the B.C. Coroners Service spearheaded Canada's only humanitarian DNA database.

The Vancouver Police Department investigated Ponzanetti's disappearance and the coroners service examined the remains but no one made a connection between the two, said Inkster.

"We try and bridge that disconnect between police missing persons investigations and our unidentified remains," he said.

After Ponzanetti's disappearance was reported to the coroners service, they recently took a DNA sample from Ponzanetti's mother and got an immediate hit.

"This came absolutely out of the blue," Inkster said.

However, the DNA pattern was very common, so the coroners service initially reserved judgment until they could prove it wasn't simply a "random chance hit."

In forensic work, an investigator might note two distinct markings when comparing fingerprints. However, several other areas of the fingerprints need to be examined before a match is determined.

Similarly, the coroners service looked at 25 of what Inkster called DNA addresses, rather than the usual 15.

The odds of an incorrect match are 20 million to one, according to Inkster.

Circumstantial details, such as the age of the bones and the date Ponzanetti was last seen alive, were also consistent.

"The family's very appreciative of what we've done here. .. but the first questions are: 'Why did it take so long?'" Inkster said.

Despite the positive identification, the cause of Ponzanetti's death remains unclear and under investigation, according to Inkster.

"If we find remains and we can't identify them we never give up, we never stop trying."

The techniques used to identify Ponzanetti could be helpful in other missing persons cases, said Inkster.

"We desperately want the family profiles of missing persons," he said.

The DNA database remains hampered by privacy concerns from family members worried their genetic samples will end up on criminal DNA databases.

The B.C. Coroners Service does not share DNA information, said Inkster.