

Washoe County Regional Medical Examiner's Office Teams with Othram to Identify a 1984 John Doe

Nearly four decades later, investigators have identified a man whose remains were found in rural Washoe County, Nevada as **Robert Smithcamp**, born December 3, 1936.

Solved

Summary



In November 1984, skeletal remains were discovered by hunters in what appears to have been a campsite north of Tracy Clark Power Station in Washoe County, Nevada. The remains also appeared to have been partially charred by a fire in the area in July 1983. Detectives determined that the remains belonged to a 35 to 45 year old white man who was approximately 5'4" tall. A dental autopsy revealed that three of the man's teeth had incomplete healing leading investigators to conclude that, prior to his death, the man had recently undergone an extraction procedure. Due to the condition of the remains, law enforcement was unable to ascertain other physical characteristics of the unknown man.

Several items were found in the vicinity of the man's remains, including a Holiday Hotel/Casino Keno ticket stamped with the date 05/04/1982, combs, can openers,

and four pennies with a date of 1980. Investigators also discovered a pink blanket near the body. In June 2008, details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as case number UP2104. Despite continuous efforts by law enforcement to identify the man, no leads have yielded a match and the case went cold.

In 2023, the Washoe County Regional Medical Examiner's Office submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract that was used in Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the unidentified man. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team used the profile in a genetic genealogy search to develop investigative leads that were returned to the Washoe County Regional Medical Examiner's Office.

Using these new leads, the Washoe County Regional Medical Examiner's Office conducted a follow-up investigation, leading to potential relatives for the man. A DNA sample from the relative was collected and compared to the DNA profile of the unknown man, confirming their relationship. The Washoe County Regional Medical Examiner's Office (WCRMEO) has now positively identified the man as Robert Smithcamp. Smithcamp was 46 at the time of his death. The cause and manner of Mr. Smithcamp's death could not be determined due to the severe skeletonization of the remains. Mr. Smithcamp's next of kin has been notified and is now able to claim his remains.

Washoe County Chief Medical Examiner and Coroner Dr. Laura D. Knight commented that "This is the fourth unidentified person from a cold case that we have been able to identify due to this partnership and the generosity of members of the public. We are thankful to be able to identify Mr. Smithcamp and give his family closure after nearly 40 years."

Funding for the advanced DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy used in this case was made possible by a combination of funding from the Washoe County Regional Medical Examiner's Office, private donors, and NamUs. NamUs is a national clearinghouse that assists the criminal justice community with the investigation and resolution of missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons cases across the United States and its territories. NamUs is funded and administered by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and is managed through a contract with Research Triangle Institute International. We are grateful for the support of RTI, NamUs, and t