

Isanti County Sheriff's Office Leverages Othram's Genetic Testing Platform to Identify a 2003 Homicide Victim

The homicide victim, now identified as Donald Rindahl, was found in 2003 during an excavation in Southeast Minnesota



Donald Rindahl

Summary

In August 2003, skeletal remains were found in the area of Hwy 47 and County Road 5 in Bradford Township. The remains were discovered during an excavation project by a land owner. It was believed the body was that of a Caucasian male, 20-28 years old and had been buried for 3 to 28 years. The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) obtained a DNA profile and dental records which were entered

into missing person databases. A facial reconstruction was also commissioned to generate clues to the unidentified person's identity.

Over several years, investigators submitted DNA samples of several people who believed that this was possibly a relative of theirs, but no relatives were confirmed. In 2019, Chief Deputy Lisa Lovering started the process of using updated DNA technology to try to identify the remains. The DNA that the BCA obtained, was submitted to a lab twice over 2019 and 2020 but the DNA sample was not suitable for any further analyze. Finally, BCA submitted material to yet another outside lab, but again, attempts at further DNA testing and analysis were not fruitful.

In 2021, Chief Deputy Lisa Lovering learned of Texas-based forensic laboratory, Othram, which uses a newer technology called Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build DNA profiles from skeletal remains. After engaging Othram, the forensic laboratory team was able to develop a new viable DNA extract. Othram built a comprehensive DNA profile and the DNA profile was sent to Investigative Genetic Genealogy Consultant Barbara Rae-Venter and Chief Deputy Lovering. Within 24 hours, Barbara had a match of a distant relative for the remains. Based off the family tree, she was able to locate two siblings and a phone number. Leads were passed to the investigators and they contacted the possible sibling about their brother.

A family member returned the call and confirmed that their brother, Donald Rindahl of Ramsey County, had been missing since 1970. They were told that the FBI had been looking for him prior to his disappearance due to involvement with drugs. Chief Deputy Lovering later met with the family and obtained DNA samples from the siblings. These samples were submitted to the BCA to compare to the DNA samples originally obtained in 2003 from the remains. By December, the BCA confirmed the biological sibling relationship and therefore were able to positively identify the unknown man as Donald Rindahl.

Based on the information from the family, as well as the scene in 2003, it is believed that Donald was a victim of homicide. It is believed that Donald was buried in Isanti County in late 1970 to early 1971 at the age of 22. It is further believed that there may still be people alive today who know what happened to Donald in 1970. Investigators are asking anyone with any information to contact the Isanti County Sheriff's Office at 763-691-2426 or CrimeStoppers of Minnesota at 800-222-8477.