

Ventura County Medical Examiner's & Sheriff's Office Team with Othram to Identify 2000 Jane Doe

After 24 years, the remains of a woman discovered in the Grimes Canyon area of Ventura County, California has been identified as Linda Laverne Orndorff Charlesworth Burka, born September 25, 1947.

Solved



Summary

In January 2000, the remains of an unidentified individual were discovered in Fillmore, California. Fillmore is a city in Ventura County located in California's Santa Clara River Valley. A surveyor who was working on Grimes Canyon Road between the cities of Fillmore and Moorpark discovered the partially buried skeletal remains. It was determined that the remains were that of a middle-aged adult female. The woman was estimated to be between 5'3" to 5'6" tall and approximately 120 to 130 pounds during her life. Along with the woman's remains, investigators found several articles of clothing and a backpack.

Traditional forensic DNA testing was performed and the profile was entered into CODIS. No familial DNA match was made. Despite the extensive work of law enforcement, the woman's identity remained a mystery. Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP559.

In June 2023, the Ventura County Sheriff's Office-Cold Case Unit and the Ventura County Medical Examiner's Office partnered with Othram to use advanced DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy to identify the woman. Skeletal remains were sent to Othram's laboratory in The Woodlands, Texas. Othram scientists developed a suitable DNA extract from the skeletal remains and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile. The profile was used by Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team to produce investigative leads, which were returned to law enforcement.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the woman. Reference DNA samples were collected for comparison analysis. The identity of Ventura County Jane Doe is now known to be Linda Laverne Orndorff Charlesworth Burka. Linda was born September 25, 1947. Linda's last known residence was in the Long Beach, California area. Details surrounding Linda's death are under investigation and updates will be shared as they become available.

Funding for the advanced DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy used in this case was provided by NamUs, 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 the NIJ.

Help Sought in Identifying Dead Woman

The Ventura County medical examiner's office is asking for the public's help in identifying a woman whose remains were found Jan. 7 in the Grimes Canyon area.

The woman died between two months and five years ago and was between the ages of 30 and 50, said Armando Chavez, a deputy coroner.

The woman was slender, possibly white or Latina, and between 5 feet, 3 inches and 5 feet, 6 inches, with reddish-brown hair.

An autopsy did not reveal a cause of death, but Chavez said there was no obvious trauma. The woman had quality dental work that was done in the last five years, including fillings, crowns and a tooth bridge.

The remains were found by a surveyor working on Grimes Canyon Road between Fillmore and Moorpark. When she died, the woman was wearing blue jeans, underpants, a T-shirt of undetermined color and black knee-high nylons with diamond patterns.

"If anybody can help us with clues or information, that would be appreciated," Chavez said. "Somebody is missing this lady."

Anyone with information should call the Ventura County Sheriff's Department at 654-2311 or the coroner's office at 641-4100.

—HOLLY J. WOLCOTT