

Investigator turns up the heat on a decade-old cold case

Written by By Babette Herrmann Sun Editor
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Sketch of 'John Doe' released

A reconstruction drawing of a murdered man whose bones were discovered in Christmas Canyon a decade ago has breathed new life into a case gone cold.

McKinley County Sheriff's Office Inv. Merle Bates said although the man's bones were discovered in early 2006, it appears the homicide took place during the late '80s or early '90s.

And he's hoping to get some help from the public on identifying this John Doe.

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According to the police report, on Feb. 13, 2006, Gallup resident Craig Lombard was walking in the area when he noticed bones protruding from the ground in a small arroyo. He initially assumed those were the bones of an animal, but decided to take a closer look.

Lombard pushed some of the dirt away, and discovered clothing on one of the bones, leading him to call authorities. At first, he pondered whether the remains were from the Anasazi era. However, forensic investigators would soon discover that the man buried there was a victim of foul play.

Upon digging, investigators noted that construction debris was piled on the body. A forensic investigation report compiled by Dr. Debra Komar noted that a decomposed sheet of plywood was found above the body, and next to the body was the interior of a car door.

She also noted that below the plywood were “several crossed 2 x 4s and several plastic bags containing sand and/or stucco. A styrofoam cooler was recovered directly above the thorax of the individual.”

A separate report compiled by the Office of the Medical Investigator Dep. Richard Malone revealed what was left of the clothing that was on the victim the day he died.

“Examination of the area revealed the top of what appeared to be a blue sock with a decomposed leather shoe top around the tibia/fibula; the top of a pair of pants with two pockets exposed; a black or dark colored ribbed belt on the pants; the corner of a blue and maroon dress shirt; and a jacket with a faded red zipper,” Malone stated.

Bates said the victim, who he described as a Native American or Hispanic male, and who stood between 5’3” to 5’8” with a slight build, was shot twice.

Daniel Wasko, who created the reconstructive drawing of “John Doe,” had a broad age range to consider when creating the sketch. Anthropologists estimated that he was in the 35- to 50-years age range. To deal with the broad gap in age, Wasko drew the man as a mixed race, Native American and Hispanic, in his 40s.

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Meanwhile, Bates hopes to find out if anyone in the region is missing a loved one or friend. So far, he has reached dead ends when searching for matches in missing persons databases, and has few clues to go on. The only dental work the victim had was a partial, but there are no fillings, or other work done to the victim's teeth to aid with identification.

The only piece of evidence is a long shot.

Bates said a calculator was found more than 14 feet south of where the victim laid, and had the name "Ramirez" on it. This particular calculator was made between 1982-85.

"It could be his, but we're not clear," he said.

Anyone with information on this case is encouraged to call Crimestoppers at (505) 722-6161.

By Babette Herrmann
Sun Editor