

Ancestors: team returning from New Zealand

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Some of the grave robbers were in search of funerary objects. And some were looking for the remains themselves, in order to sell or otherwise add them to a museum collection.

The Yale Peabody Museum in Connecticut received many Wasco remains, identifiable by the shape of the cranium. Ms. Kirk then explains:

At some point in the 1880s the Peabody Museum apparently exchanged some of its Wasco remains and objects with the Canterbury Museum in New Zealand, in exchange for Māori remains and objects.

The looting, selling and trading of Native American remains was not unusual at the time. On the contrary, estimates at time of NAGPRA were that half a million Native American remains were held by museums in the U.S. alone.

More than 100,000—along with a million funerary objects—could not be associated with any specific tribe or tribes.

Under NAGPRA many of those that could be identified have been returned for repatriation to tribes, including to the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

The remains from the Canterbury Museum will be the first the tribes have received from a museum in a foreign country. Ms. Kirk details how the repatriation came about:

“Back in 1996 an artist friend was traveling in New Zealand, and while there he went to the Canterbury Museum,” becoming aware of the Columbia River ancestral remains.

“The tribe he first alerted was the Umatilla, and they got the ball rolling,” Roberta says. “We heard about it and wanted to be involved. And we started a conversation with the Canterbury Museum.”

Evidence at the museum was that the remains were from The Dalles area, and could therefore be Wasco. This belief was strengthened by observing the distinctive



Courtesy Roberta Kirk

The Columbia River Tribes repatriation team: From Warm Springs are Tashina Eastman (back row third from left), Roberta Kirk (back row second from right), and Rosie Johnson (seated at the left). They are joined by members of the Yakama, Umatilla and Māori.



Courtesy David Walker/Stuff

Canterbury Museum held a ceremony to return three ancestral skulls of First Nations people on Monday.

shape of the craniums, indicating a ‘flathead’ or Wasco royalty lineage.

The tribes contacted the Canterbury Museum to see if they could ship the remains back to the tribes. The museum board, though, said they would prefer a more significant and formal transfer ceremony, involving the Māori.

The U.S. National Parks Service was not able to help the tribes with travel expenses—as it with cases under NAGPRA—because the

Canterbury Museum is outside of the jurisdiction.

Instead, the tribal team raised donations. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Credit Enterprise, Indian Head Casino, Power and Water, GeoVisions and Ventures chipped in for the Warm Springs team, which includes Roberta, Rosie Johnson and Tashina Eastman.

Co-workers and the community helped. And Roberta set up a

GoFundMe account, helping cover some of the costs.

The team left for New Zealand last Saturday, and will return this week, with the repatriation ceremony set for this Saturday, March 16.

The Warm Springs Seniors program is taking sign-ups for elders who wish to attend the ceremony. The

Seniors Program will provide bus transportation.

Three of the Māori people are planning to attend. A tribal meal at the Celilo Longhouse will follow the re-burial. The Confederated Tribes provided salmon, deer meat and roots.

Interestingly, the Māori are long-time friends of the

tribes. They have visited Warm Springs on a number of occasions. The Māori and Warm Springs share similar cultural traditions, such as unique basketry and traditional dance.

It was by fortunate chance that the Māori are the tribe to assist with the repatriation.

— Dave McMechan



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Courtesy David Walker/Stuff

Aaron Ashley from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation was ‘overwhelmed’ with emotion during the ceremony on Monday.

Second repatriation from Canterbury Museum

The tribes and the Canterbury Museum believe the remains were potentially sold to the museum by Professor Henry Ward in the early 1900s. Ward was an American scientist, explorer and museum builder.

He travelled the globe trading, purchasing and amassing a huge collec-

tion of fossils and other objects for his collections.

On Easter Island

This is the second time Canterbury Museum has returned ancestral remains to another country. In 2018, remains were returned to the Rapa Nui—the aboriginal Polynesian inhabitants of Easter Island.

Delay by earthquake

The Canterbury Museum director and staff are pleased the Wasco remains are finally being returned to the ancestral homelands. Part of the delay in the process was due to a powerful earthquake that struck Christchurch in 2011.