

NATIVE NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

Judge Reactivates Lawsuit Over Kennewick Man

PORTLAND, OR. (AP)— A federal judge is allowing a lawsuit over one of the oldest and most complete human skeletons ever found in North America to go forward, setting in motion a case that could ultimately redefine the term "Native American."

U.S. Magistrate John Jelderks recently reactivated a 1996 lawsuit by scientists who want to continue studying Kennewick Man, a set of 9,000-year-old bones that have already forced anthropologists to rethink theories about the origin of Native Americans.

Five American Indian Tribes have claimed him as an ancestor, and have said study of the bones would violate their religious traditions.

The lawsuit contesting a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers decision to turn the bones over to the Tribes was put on hold, pending research by the Interior Department. In September the department decided the Tribes should be allowed to rebury the bones. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said he determined the remains

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were "culturally affiliated" with the Tribes because they were found near their aboriginal lands.

During a recent status conference, Jelderks questioned whether he understood the Justice Department's position that any human remains or artifacts that predate Christopher Columbus' arrival in the New World in 1492 are by definition "Native American."

Under that theory, for instance, any remains of Vikings from their five or more voyages to North America around the year 1000 would be considered "Native American" and given to modern-day Tribes for reburial.

After the government lawyers con-

firmed their definition, Jelderks told lawyers for the Tribes — the Umatilla, the Yakama, the Colvilles, the Wanapum and the Nez Perce — to consider whether they agree because it "might have implications beyond this case."

Kennewick Man was discovered in the shallows of the Columbia River in 1996 in Kennewick, Washington.

The skeleton's skull has features that are dissimilar to those of modern American Indians.

Anthropologists who studied the bones for the Interior Department have said Kennewick Man appeared to have the strongest connection to populations from Polynesia and southern Asia.

The discovery could support newer theories that the continent's earliest arrivals came not by a land bridge between Russia and Alaska — a long-held theory — but by boat or some other route.

Eight anthropologists, including two from the Smithsonian Institution, who filed the lawsuit, say they hope further study and tests could help unmask the ethnic identities of the first humans on this continent, where they came from, and what their cultures were like. But the Tribes say that testing already done for the government is enough.

ON THE NET:

Department of Interior: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/kennewick>
 Kennewick Man Virtual Interpretive Center:
<http://www.kennewick-man.com>

Smithsonian Returns Chugach Masks; on Display in Anchorage

ANCHORAGE, AK. (AP)— Seven ancient masks from the Prince William Sound region have been returned to Alaska after years in storage at the Smithsonian Institution.

The masks were returned recently to descendants of the people who probably wore the masks in dance ceremonies before Europeans reached their shores.

"These are extremely rare," said John Johnson, Cultural Resource Manager for Chugach Alaska Corp. "They're the only known masks in the Chugach Natives' possession."

Reclaiming the large wooden masks from a warehouse in Virginia was a career highlight for Johnson. His job includes securing the return of bodies and artifacts taken from burial caves in the 19th and 20th centuries.

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said Johnson.

All the valuables — the masks, the artifacts, even the dead — had been removed by anthropologists and collectors.

The masks were sold in 1875 to the Alaska Commercial Company.

A company ledger shows an expense of \$12 "for securing masks and mummies" on Sept. 28, 1875.

All seven masks prominently bear the company name in neat white script near the mouth.

"They got a little carried away writing on them," Johnson said.

Six are on temporary display at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

The Chugach — sometimes called Aleut — have few artifacts compared with other Alaska Native people, Johnson said. Objects made from wood simply don't last long in wet weather, he said.

What did survive often was removed by anthropologists and treasure seekers. But because they were taken to places such as the Smithsonian, they also were preserved, Johnson said.

"They kind of helped us out, indirectly."

A 1990 federal law, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, makes it easier for

Natives to recover the bones and funerary objects of their ancestors.

The seven masks repatriated from the Smithsonian appear to have been dance masks, Johnson said.

They have wooden bits and straps used to hold them to the dancer's face. Nostrils served as peepholes, and traces of color on the back appear to have come from dancers' face paint.

"I think a lot of these masks were used in ceremonies for hunting, to have good luck hunting," said Johnson.

Carbon dating suggests the wood in the masks is 200 to 300 years old.

Getting the masks back is important to a cultural revival in the area, Johnson said. "They've (Tribal Elders) used pictures of the seven masks to guide their woodcarving, but there's no substitute for seeing the real thing, said Johnson.

"We didn't realize how big they are," he said.

Funding for Dine College overlooked

SHIPROCK, N.M. (AP)— A new Dine College campus in Shiprock may have to wait because requested federal funding did not come through.

A spokesman for U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) says requested funding involving more than \$20 million in startup costs for a campus scientific center is a dead issue for the 2001 federal fiscal year.

The proposed funding for a Native Nations Southwest Research Laboratory never evolved as part of any appropriations bill in either the Energy or Interior departments, Domenici spokesman Joe Trujillo said.

This means the earliest funding could be approved for the laboratory would be fiscal year 2002, if a bill containing it is successful next fall.

That funding would not be available until February 2002, were it to be approved as part of a future bill, Trujillo said.

Both Domenici and Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) have expressed support for the project.

The Native Nations Southwest Research Laboratory is a concept to use high-speed data links around the world to help conduct research in energy, environmental science, computer science, engineering and medicine.

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"We had a long list of requests early on, and we asked for it," Trujillo said. "It never made it past the first stage."

Bingaman spokesman Jim Bonham was less ready to say funding for the laboratory is dead at this point.

"I wouldn't go that far on it, but they (Republican appropriation committee members) are going to know better than us. In the end game, it's not coming up anywhere."

A groundbreaking ceremony for the Shiprock campus was held June 2, but the construction has yet to begin.

Shiprock campus project manager Cindy Bates refused comment on what has delayed the first phase of the new campus.

First phase funding amounts to \$4.2 million, contributed by the Navajo Nation, a state general obligation bond passed in 1998, and the American Indian College Fund.