

DNA solves Sherman County man's fate nearly 60 years after disappearance



Sherman County Sheriff Gerald Lohrey at the recovery site in 1989

The fate of a man who disappeared along The John Day River in 1964 was finally settled in 2022, thanks to advances in DNA technology.

According to a news release by Oregon State Police, the remains of a human skeleton were discovered by a rafting group on the Sherman County side of the John Day River on March 26, 1989. On March 27, then-Sheriff Gerald Lohrey and additional Sherman County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) deputies launched a jet boat at Cottonwood Bridge, approximately 13 miles east of Wasco, and recovered the incomplete skeletal remains. In addition to many long bones that had been half-buried in silt on the riverbank, a skull was collected with dental work.

The discovery of the body made local headlines, but nothing was immediately known about the deceased. The remains were transported to the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office (SMEO) for exam-

ination.

An examination of the body determined that the bones most likely belonged to a Caucasian male, between 40 and 50 years of age at the time of death, and around 5'6" to 5'9" in living stature. Evidence of compressed lumbar vertebrae by the forensic anthropologist indicated possible arthritic changes in the bone. It was noted that several teeth in the mandible exhibited restorations. Additional searches of the area were performed on March 28 and April 8, 1989; both searches yielded additional small bones and several teeth.

Leads on the possible identification of this individual were received by the SCSO in the following days and weeks; numerous reporting parties indicated they believed the remains to be that of David West, Jr., a man who had disappeared from Sherman County trying to cross the John Day River during a large flooding event in 1964. West had lived on a ranch near Bridge

Creek and was known to cross the John Day often. He normally went back and forth across the river to feed cattle. He and a friend had even built a makeshift cable car across the river to assist in quickly navigating the waters back and forth over the John Day.

The day the John Day River flooded in 1964, West was thought to be feeding cattle near Ashwood. A friend went to check on him and saw that the cable car had been washed away, the large tree that had held the cable was uprooted, and West's dog was injured and agitated on the bank of the river. West was never seen or heard from again.

In 1989, West's dentist was consulted, but no conclusive identification was ever made.

The remains were retained by the SMEO. In 2010, the SMEO submitted a bone sample to the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification. The sample was processed and yielded a forensic DNA profile for comparison and upload into CODIS (Combined DNA Index System). Unfortunately, no genetic associations to missing persons or family reference standards in the CODIS database were established.

In April 2022, the SMEO recognized the effectiveness of investigative genetic genealogy on cold

unidentified remains cases and submitted an additional bone sample to Othram, a private DNA lab specializing in advanced forensic DNA testing. Othram uses an in-house whole genome sequencing technique that can provide genetic information and possible familial associations even with a low-yield sample. The analysis revealed the name of two biological relatives of David West Jr. as being genetically associated with the remains.

Both the Gilliam County Sheriff Gary Bettencourt and the Sherman County Sheriff Brad Lohrey (the son of Sheriff Gerald Lohrey) worked to contact family members; Sheriff Bettencourt collected oral swab standards from one relative, and these were submitted and tested by Othram.

The genetic association was confirmed through DNA comparison by Othram in September 2022, and the family was notified of the positive identification.

"We are very excited that such an old case was able to be solved. It is amazing what our forensic teams can accomplish with modern technology. This was a case that was a mystery for generations here at the Sherman County Sheriff's Office. I'm happy that the family of the deceased finally has closure," said Sheriff Brad Lohrey.

Lexington council meeting Feb. 14

The Lexington Town Council will hold a regular public council meeting Tuesday, Feb. 14, at 6:30 p.m. at Lexington Town Hall, 425 F Street, Lexington.

The council will also hold a public community engagement work session

for Goal 9 planning prior to the regular council meeting. Goal 9 planning is to make sure cities and counties have enough land available to realize economic growth and development opportunities. The work session will begin at 5 p.m. at Lexington Town Hall.

January warmer, dryer than normal

Temperatures around Heppner averaged slightly warmer than normal during January, according to preliminary data received by NOAA's National Weather Service in Pendleton.

The average temperature for the month was 37.3 degrees, which was 1.7 degrees warmer than the normal average temperature for January. High temperatures averaged 45.7 degrees, with a high of 60 degrees being recorded on the 14th. Low temperatures averaged 28.8 degrees, with the low of eight degrees being recorded on the 30th. There were 23 days when the low temperature was below 32 degrees, and two days when the high temperature was less than 32 degrees.

Precipitation was much

Wolf committee to meet

The Morrow County Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee will meet Wednesday, Feb. 15, at 7 p.m. in the Bartholomew Building Upper Conference Room in Heppner. The committee is an advisory committee to the Morrow County Board of Commissioners.

The primary agenda item will be determining total amounts of 2023 grant funds for which to apply and in what categories. Categories include compensation for missing,

A View from the Hill

By Doris Brosnan

A new administrator has been chosen for Willow Creek Terrace, and everyone views that as a big positive. Leann Lankford has had over 20 years' experience in hospital and clinic supervision, so is prepared to add assisted-living to her resume.

Lankford has joined the staff in time to enjoy the Valentine's Day special luncheon, this year surf-and-turf with tri-tip and shrimp. And she will surely enjoy the apartment decorations the residents have made.

Two more special lunches this month will be for the birthday celebrants. Sharing their menu requests with neighbors and family will be Rita Bowman, who turns 95 on the eighth, and Alex Camarillo, who will be a youthful 98 on the 11th.

February features, as usual, the Bingo game on Mondays, which has been well-attended. Enjoyed on Fridays are the craft sessions that Jackie Alleman leads. The second Sundays

of each month are now offering a non-denominational service led by Jerry Conklin, the chaplain of the Morrow County Home Health and Hospice service.

Last Wednesday afternoon, Conklin and Alleman also offered the first of 13 grief sharing support meetings that will be held at the Terrace. Persons with questions about the Wednesday meetings can call Morrow County Home Health and Hospice.

On the seventh, Residents will be offered assistance if they want it for reaching out to a friend with a greeting card. On the 12th, a Super Bowl lunch will precede the big game. On the 28th, Cynthia Wenberg will come to the Terrace to instruct and assist Residents with creating floral designs.

As Residents view the days passing so seemingly fast, they can also view the variety of activities offered at the Terrace as an opportunity to enjoy some of those days in uncommon ways.

Heppner chamber switches to quarterly lunches

Due to member feedback, the Heppner Chamber of Commerce is switching from monthly to quarterly chamber lunch meetings.

Lunches will take place from noon to 1:20 p.m. at the Gilliam and Bisbee Event Center. Each lunch will feature a guest speaker

followed by reports and networking.

Meeting dates for the year are April 13, July 13 and Oct. 12. Contact the chamber of commerce at 541-676-5536 or heppnerchamber@gmail.com for more information.

Greater Idaho bill introduced in Idaho legislature

A bill that would invite Oregon to begin talks with the Idaho Legislature about relocating their state line was unanimously awarded a bill number, HJM 1, by the Idaho House of Representatives' State Affairs Committee last week after a short discussion.

It was then read on the floor of the House. A full hearing before the committee was scheduled for February 13 at 9 a.m.

The bill mirrors a bill introduced into this session of the Oregon Legislature by Senator Dennis Linthicum.

Cemetery district to meet

The Heppner Cemetery Maintenance District will hold its monthly meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 15, at 5:30 p.m. Agenda items include minutes of previous meetings, financial report and cemetery operations. The meeting will be held

at the Ag Service Building conference room at 430 W Linden Way.

Meetings of the Heppner Cemetery Maintenance District are open to the public. Contact Janet Greenup at 541-561-6768 with questions.

Conservation and recreation fund grant cycle now open

SALEM, Ore.—The ODFW's Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund request for grant proposals is now open and will close on March 27, 2023. Interested applicants should visit the ODFW grants webpage at <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/OCRF/grants.asp>.

The maximum allowable grant request per institution and/or organization is \$50,000 per project. Any public or private nonprofit may request funds and must have a tax-exempt status under the IRS Code Section 501(c)(3). Please note the newly required cap on institutional/organizational indirect overhead rates at 20 percent of the requested project budget as well as the updated project insurance

guidelines.

OCRF has supported more than 90 projects since forming in early 2020 and is a way for Oregonians to support projects that protect and enhance the species and habitats identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy and to create new opportunities for wildlife watching, urban conservation, community science and other wildlife-associated recreation.

The ODFW Advisory Committee reviews proposals and provides recommendations on expenditures from the Fund to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.

More information on the ODFW can be found at OregonIsAlive.org.

What is Cursillo?

Make a friend, be a friend and bring a friend to Christ. Come and join us Sunday, February 19th for an evening of fellowship with your brothers & Sisters in Christ. A Spaghetti dinner will be provided. Our evening will begin at 5:00pm as we gather for dinner at Hopeful Saints Church. If you know of someone that is interested or curious about The Cursillo Movement invite them to join us. We will be sharing information about Cursillo & this year's upcoming weekend. We will also have applications available to work on the team. If you are reading this and you are curious about Cursillo please do come and share a meal with us, there will be plenty for everyone. We do hope you will join us: February 19th @ Hopeful Saints Church, (140 Church Street Heppner, OR) beginning at 5:00PM. Dinner is provided by the Heppner area 4th Day Group. For further information please contact: Diana Sharp 509-781-1028 or George Nairns 541-571-6519 Eastern Oregon Cursillo Community Mission Statement: Cursillo is an ecumenical community of faith, love and hope that supports individuals in our search for discovery and renewal in Christ.



GOAL 9: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The communities of the Willow Creek Valley along with the Morrow County Planning Department need your help to plan for future commercial and industrial land use. At this meeting our consulting partners will provide information about the supply of developable employment lands and regional economic trends and opportunities. We need your insights on commercial areas and growth opportunities to feed into this evaluation. This effort contributes to Oregon's statewide planning Goal 9: Economic Opportunities Analysis requirements.

Facilitated by



To learn more, ask questions, and provide input to better our community, join us at **5PM, prior to the Lexington council meeting** 425 F Street, Lexington Oregon

Or by Zoom at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81234015000?pwd=YkM5bXRqYkgydG9yNlhwOjNlWmM3g3dz09>

Contact lexington.oregon@gmail.com or 541-989-8515 with questions. Snacks will be provided.

lexingtonoregon.com

We'll see you there!

In partnership with the Morrow County Planning Department

