

Lake County Sheriff's Office & California DOJ Partner with Othram to Identify a 1979 Homicide Victim

After nearly 50 years, a woman whose remains were found in a wooded area off Highway 175 in the unincorporated area of Lakeport, California, has been identified as Wanda Lee Brewer.

Solved



Summary

Body found in Lakeport area

LAKEPORT — The skeletal remains of an unidentified body were discovered about 12:30 p.m. Tuesday off Highway 175 near the Mendocino County line.

The Lake County Sheriff's Office said a man and a woman were looking for bottles and cans in a brushy area and found the body about 20 feet from the roadway.

The department does not know if it was a man or woman, nor if foul play was involved. An investigation is underway.

In September 1979, a hunter stumbled upon skeletal remains in the area of Highway 175 between mile markers .80 and .83 in Lake County, California, just northwest of

Sacramento. Investigators were called to the scene and determined that the remains were that of a female whose ancestry could not be definitively determined. The woman was estimated to be between 25 and 35 years old at her time of death, which was estimated to be between 1976 and 1979. The woman's height was determined to be between 5'1" and 5'4". No other identifying characteristics could be determined.

In June 2019, case details were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP58032. With limited identifying characteristics available, the woman's identity remained unknown for nearly five decades despite the efforts of law enforcement. Throughout the years, the Lake County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) followed up with the California Department of Justice (CA DOJ) to use emerging technology to identify this Jane Doe.



In 2023, the California Department of Justice in collaboration with the Lake County Sheriff's Office submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas in hopes that advanced DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy could help generate new leads and identify the woman. Othram's casework costs for the case were provided by the Roads to Justice (RTJ) program. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the forensic evidence and used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the unknown woman. Once the profile was successfully built, Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team produced new investigative leads that were provided to the Lake County Sheriff's Office.

Using these new leads, the Lake County Sheriff's Office continued their investigation which led to genetic relatives of the woman. A reference sample was collected from

a potential relative and compared to the DNA profile of the woman. This comparison confirmed the identity of Lake County Jane Doe as Wanda Lee Brewer. Brewer was born in Arkansas and later moved to California. An investigation into the circumstances around Brewer's death continues.