**‘A wrong had finally been righted’: Tribes bury remains of ancient ancestor known as Kennewick Man**

**The Ancient One, also known as Kennewick Man, was reburied early Saturday in the high desert of the Columbia Plateau, ending 20 years of legal battles and scientific study.**

Originally published February 19, 2017

By

[Sara Jean Green](https://www.seattletimes.com/author/sara-jean-green/)

*Seattle Times staff reporter*

In the high desert of the Columbia Plateau, more than 200 people gathered early Saturday to lay the Ancient One to rest, returning his 9,000-year-old remains to an undisclosed location not far from the Columbia River.

There was a feeling of finality and catharsis for those who had fought for 20 years to reclaim and repatriate the remains of an ancient ancestor who came to be called Kennewick Man, said Chuck Sams, communications director for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

There was also sadness in remembering those who didn’t live to see the Ancient One’s reburial, but also a sense of accomplishment in seeing him returned after two decades of court battles and scientific studies, Sams said.

Scientists who had argued that Kennewick Man was not an ancestor of the Columbia Plateau tribes were proved wrong, and the return of the Ancient One’s remains “validated what we said all along — Kennewick Man had been one of our own,” he said.

Sams was present [on Friday at Seattle’s Burke Museum](http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/kennewick-man-may-be-sent-home-to-ancestral-land-soon/) when the state’s historic-preservation officer met with historic-preservation officers from the Umatilla, Yakama Nation, Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Wanapum Band of Indians to go over the inventory of bones and dozens of vials containing DNA samples.

Also returned to the tribes was a projectile point that had penetrated the Ancient One’s right hip, he said.

The tribes’ religious leaders then bundled the items together and began a caravan east, staying overnight in Richland before meeting up at the burial site on Saturday with other tribal members and non-Indian staff members, said Sams. The morning was overcast and chilly but the rain held off, he said.

The five tribes practice the Washat religion, so their burial ceremony isn’t the same as burial rites practiced 9,000 years ago. “But the songs we sing are very close and have been sung throughout the Columbia Plateau for thousands of years,” said Sams.

“A wrong had finally been righted,” he said of the Ancient One’s return, though he noted there are more than 100,000 sets of Native American remains in both private and public collections across the country.

Unearthed from the banks of the Columbia River in 1996, the bones comprise one of the oldest and most complete human skeletons ever discovered in North America. The find set off a bitter legal battle between scientists who wanted to study the remains and local tribes who wanted them reinterred.

While tribes thought the issue would be quickly resolved under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, scientists won in court and conducted several rounds of analysis on the bones. [Later DNA tests](http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/kennewick-man-mystery-solved-dna-says-hes-native-american/)confirmed the remains were most closely related to modern Native Americans.

[Under legislation signed by former President Barack Obama in December](http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/legislative-enables-transfer-of-kennewick-man-to-the-tribes/), the remains were transferred from the federal government to the tribes.

***Sara Jean Green****: 206-515-5654 or**sgreen@seattletimes.com**; on Twitter:*[*@SJGTimes*](https://twitter.com/SJGTimes)*.*

**‘What to do with the remains of Deer Isle Man, found on Penobscot tribal lands, but possibly of Viking origin**

**In a story clearly reminiscent of the Kennewick Man of Washington State, tribal leaders and scientists are at loggerheads over who should decide the destiny of Deer Isle Man.**

Originally published February 20, 2020

By

Michael Warden

*Penobscot Daily staff reporter*

On the windy coast of Maine, on an island with two protected natural harbors, the remains of an ancient skeleton have been found in a cave. To date the closest confirmed Viking remains found were in Newfoundland, but evidently some other artifacts were found with Deer Isle Man that point to the possibility of Viking origin.

“This is all too familiar,” says Kirk Francis, the Penobscot Tribal Chief. “The exact same thing happened in Washington State 20 years ago. An indigenous body was found, and based on rumors of European origin, the ancestral remains were not returned to his people for 20 years.”

Scientists argue that they have found physical materials that are very clearly not Native American in origin. Rolf Sigurdson admits that there are some painful parallels but states confidently, “this is a different scenario, with compelling physical evidence in hand. And, if by some unlikely chance we are proven wrong then we will return the remains to the Penobscot tribal authorities immediately.”

Tensions run high in the local communities around Deer Isle as Penobscot Natives, locals and interested scientists all want answers…preferably before 20 years have gone by.

**Classroom Debate**

Decide whether you think the Penobscot Tribe or the scientists should retain immediate control of Deer Isle Man.

Divide into 2 groups in the classroom facing each other. If the groups are too lopsided then you may be asked to move and play “Devil’s Advocate”. Think persuasively—how can you change someone’s mind on the other side (Hint: this generally isn’t done by attacking the other person or their views).

Once the debate is over, make your final decision and complete one of the two sets of tasks below:

If you decide for the scientists then make a plan that deals with the following:

* Brief press statements for immediate aftermath of decision to keep remains and an announcement of results (both positive and negative that he is a Viking)
* A plan if results are positive for how he will be preserved, made available to the public, and if there will be further testing

If you decide for the Penobscot Tribe then make a plan that deals with the following:

* Brief press statement for immediate aftermath of decision to bury remains
* Decision for whether to make location of remains public (either to Tribe or public at large) or not and your reasoning