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UCSD Administration Denies Research Access to La Jolla Skeletons *DNA study could yield definitive answers on the origins of North Americans*

By [Dave Good](http://www.sandiego.com/writers/dave-good) (http://www.sandiego.com/writers/dave-good) • Sun, May 29th, 2011

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What we know enough about them fills a scant paragraph: a man and a woman, he in his mid 30's and she in her mid 40's or 50's at the time of their deaths. They lived in La Jolla. They were buried together, head to foot.

And, at nearly 10,000 years old, theirs are among the oldest known remains in North America.

It is what we don't know about the La Jolla Paleo-Indians that could fill a volume about human genetics, about how North America was colonized. But if the local Kumeyaay band of Indians have their way, science may not get the chance to write that book.

Since 2006, lobbyists for the Kumeyaay have petitioned to gain control of the skeletons that were unearthed on UCSD land in 1976. Called "the genetic crown jewels of the peopling of the Americas" by some researchers, UCSD administrators have since withdrawn scientific access to the skeletons.

The problem is this: the remains may not be Kumeyaay. Modern science can only trace the ancestry of Native Americans back to about 7,000 years ago. "We are now beginning to realize," says UCSD anthropologist Margaret Schoeninger via email, "that some of these early folks may have come from the area of Polynesia or Japan. It isn't known if they died out or if they left descendants."

The skeletons were found on a bluff in La Jolla known as a prime archaeological site since the 1920's. A private residence was built there during the 1950's. It became the property of UCSD in 1967, and the residence became the Chancellor's House. A decade later, UCLA professor Gail Kennedy and a student crew discovered the remains during an archaeological field project on the site.

Schoeninger has helped oversee the repatriation negotiations since 2007. UCSD's findings that the remains could not be affiliated with the Kumeyaay because of carbon dating and other relevant data, she says, carefully followed federal guidelines. But a new 2010 ruling from the US Department of the Interior stated that even culturally unaffiliated Native American remains could be given to a federally recognized tribe that asked for them. A request was sent to UCSD Chancellor Marye Anne Fox requesting that she revise the report. In 2009, she and UC President Mark Yudof began seeking approval to hand the skeletons over to the Kumeyaay tribe.

Not all American Indians, says Schoeninger, are anti-research. "There are additional Native Americans, not Kumeyaay, who think

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http://static.sandiego.com/articlefiles/31249c3d-0d07-4cf7-bda1-06fd472f5b86/skull_325.jpg La Jolla dig site UCSD

these skeletons can tell them about their own ancestors and that they belong to more tribes than the Kumeyaay and they should not be given sole decision-making power.”

But a lobbyist for the Kumeyaay has indicated that the tribe has plans to re-bury the remains. “All that important information that could be useful to so many living American Indians,” says Schoeninger, “will be lost.”

For now, the Chancellor’s House skeletons are in storage, pending decision, at the San Diego Archaeology Center.

The Details

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Elle

If researching them can help you to understand where your people came from, why would have such a problem with it? I just don't get it.

4 days ago ([#comment-216469828](#))

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Djohnnyk

People are too sensitive about too many things... We all live we all die.

1 week ago ([#comment-214418346](#))

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Susan

Good for the University of California at San Diego for providing equal protection to Native American graves. Wouldn't it be horrible if some other nation were to want to desecrate the graves at Arlington National Cemetery in the name of science?

1 week ago ([#comment-214324874](#))

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Clark

The 2010 rulings says the remains COULD be given to a federally recognized tribe. It doesn't say they have to. I think it is far more important to learn what we can from these remains. We already know there is no such thing as Native Americans. All of our ancestors migrated from somewhere else

1 week ago ([#comment-214307541](#))

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Joe Doakes

It seems the Kumeyaay have everything to gain by claiming the remains as theirs and interring them without study. If they were to be tested and shown to be from another, distinctive people, then their ancestral claims to this area would be somehow diminished. Is this what they are afraid of? Science versus mythology?

[1 week ago \(#comment-214127256\)](#) [1 Like \(#\)](#)

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Calvitre

that goes both ways...what is science afraid of losing? Are they promoting another speculative assertion as the latest truths? Will it be the latest 'truths; such as Samuel Morton's measuring intelligence by packing beans in skull? Methodologies change constantly...there is little consistency in science aside from loyalties to a predecessors theories. In addition, DNA testing is another speculative methodology and is not an absolute determination of ones ancestry. It only detects a percentage of an individual genetic lineage, mtDNA & Y dna, mothers....and fathers...nothing in between. Science is not the end and the ultimate authority by no means. To scientist, science is their mythology - their religion and certainly their oldest narrative that is deemed to be sacred by a particular group of people.

[6 days ago \(#comment-214617504\)](#) [in reply to Joe Doakes \(#comment-214127256\)](#) [1 Like \(#\)](#)

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Joe Doakes

I find this writing difficult to comprehend. Sorry.

[5 days ago \(#comment-215425500\)](#) [in reply to Calvitre \(#comment-214617504\)](#)

[Like \(#\)](#) [Reply \(#\)](#)



Dave

Afraid, perhaps, of destroying the myth of "native Americans?"

[1 week ago \(#comment-214404227\)](#) [in reply to Joe Doakes \(#comment-214127256\)](#)

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Bnmiller

please have someone contact the san diego safari park and tell them how distasteful their add in the sunday los angeles times is. a rhino subjected to the indignity of pulling a sightseeing wagon. oi vey!

[1 week ago \(#comment-214085497\)](#) [1 Like \(#\)](#)

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rickeysays

If us living type people can give DNA w/o any muss or fuss, I fail to see why two 10,000 yr old skeletons can't. Come on UCSD! Enough with the political correctness and "Cultural sensitivity". Let the skeletons give some DNA!

[1 week ago \(#comment-214009620\)](#) [3 Likes \(#\)](#)

[Like \(#\)](#) [Reply \(#\)](#)



Dave

A couple of scrapes of marrow from each and then bury them. Bada-bing!

[1 week ago \(#comment-214403655\)](#) [in reply to rickeysays \(#comment-214009620\)](#) [2 Likes \(#\)](#)

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