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Do things right . . .

Posted on September 15th, 2008 by earlehollland

It's not hard to do what's right. But sometimes, it can be difficult.

The differences between the two adjectives may seem subtle in the abstract, but when they describe ongoing situations, distinctions become clearer.

Ohio State researchers did a good deed last week but it wasn't easy. For at least two decades, boxes of bones have been patiently stored in the anthropology department's building on campus. They had been unearthed in the early 1960s during an archaeological dig in West Virginia and were the last remains of a group of Native Americans living in the western part of the state, in what is now Putnam County.

Through a circuitous route, the "Buffalo 600" – as they became known – passed through several hands as individuals volunteered to do small studies of the remains in hopes of identifying the lineage of the long-lost people. The collection eventually landed at the [University of Toledo](#).



In the early 1990s, an Ohio State graduate student was visiting the Toledo campus and learned that the bones were about to be discarded. He rescued the remains and with anthropology professor [Paul Scullin](#), trucked them back to the Columbus campus, where they stayed until last week.

The remains were repacked for storage and catalogued and on Wednesday, they were turned over to the [Grave Creek Mound Archaeological Complex Research Facility](#) in Moundsville, WV.

That was the right thing to do, but it was far from easy.

To begin with, remains like these are controlled by provisions of the federal [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act](#) and their disposition must meet fairly strict guidelines. Organizations possessing such remains must keep them safe and secure. And any efforts to rebury, or "repatriate," them must be done in conjunction with the tribe that they're affiliated with.

But for the Buffalo 600, no tribal linkage had been made in the decades since the remains were unearthed. That meant that Ohio State was legally bound to safeguard the remains until "ownership" and "control" – both legal terms – were established. That was solved when West Virginia officials provided the university with documents showing its control over the

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collection from the beginning.

Equally challenging was an ongoing quandary within the



anthropological/archaeological community. While scientists in these fields easily recognize that reburial is appropriate for such remains, they also know that once buried, the possibility of learning anything more about these ancient peoples is lost forever. There are ample examples of cases where newer technology, once it is available, is used to discover important new information about lost cultures. No scientists enjoy closing the book on future discoveries.

In the end, turning the collection back over to West Virginia officials was the right thing to do.

“The new research facility in Moundsville is excellent and they will be well-protected, and available for study, until their final disposition is determined,” said [Clark Spencer Larsen](#), professor and chair of anthropology.

Juggling federal law, concerns over science and basic humanity, while difficult, can be done. It just usually can't be done quickly. __[Earle Holland](#)

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[Michael Payday](#) // Sep 15, 2008 at 12:07 pm

It will be interesting to see what tribe this group descends from...they have to find out before they can do anything with the bones?

Unrelated note- what do you think of the large particle collider in Europe revving up? I'm hoping big breakthroughs come about, but there's a lot of doomsday naysayers tellings us a big black hole is coming. Are those claims valid?

[Michael Payday](#) // Sep 18, 2008 at 5:23 pm

Very true, seems we're all still standing 😊

So have they collided these particles and begun gathering data about the

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possible origin of the universe with the LHC?

[earleholland](#) // Sep 18, 2008 at 5:52 pm

So far, they have only gotten the beam going, I believe. You'll have to be patient in expecting quick discoveries

[JessicaDalm](#) // May 10, 2009 at 10:08 am

Very nice blog. I totally agree with your thoughts.

[ArianaText](#) // May 13, 2009 at 5:15 am

I really liked this post. Can I copy it to my site? Thank you in advance.

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