

RESTORING ANCIENT REMAINS



Photos: Jodi Miller/
Advocate Staff Photographer

Marco Antonio, left, passes a deerskin bundle of human remains to be restored to the burial site at Buckeye Knoll in southeast Victoria County. Lucila Maestas, above, carries a rock to place on top of the restored Buckeye Knoll burial site. Because of Apache spiritual beliefs, only black-and-white photographs could be taken at the restoration.

CORPORATE AMERICA HELPS RETURN ANCESTORS TO THEIR HOMES

PATRICK BRENDL

Victoria Advocate

Before the ceremony began that would restore ancient human remains to one of the oldest burial sites in the world, the chairman of the Lipan Apache Band of Texas explained to visitors that they were about to take part in a ritual that had been passed down continuously for more than 8 millennia.

He asked that the men be anointed with ash and the women with pollen before beginning the burial rites because his people believe that ash and pollen prevent spirits of the dead from returning to this world.

Chairman Daniel Castro Romero Jr. said that the restoration Saturday morning at the Buckeye Knoll site in south Victo-

Replicas displayed

Replicas of the artifacts found at Buckeye Knoll will be on display at the Museum of the Coastal Bend in Victoria.

Online: <http://museumofthecoastalbend.org>

Address: The Victoria College Campus, corner of Ben Jordan and Red River streets

Phone: 361-582-2511

Hours of operation: Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

ria County validates the model of "joint stewardship" between Native American tribes and corporate America whenever remains and artifacts are found on a company's land.

"As chief of the Lipan Apaches, I am forever humble with Invista for helping to return our ancestors to their homes," he said.

Romero said he was thankful to avoid the kind of controversy that is still swirling around the 1996 discovery of 9,200-year-old "Kinneweck man" in southern Washington state. Because of his age, no one knows where the ancient being's remains should be restored or if should even be considered a Native American.

The Buckeye Knoll site was discovered in 2000 on property belonging to Dupont, now Invista, and yielded artifacts never seen in this part of the country, as well as the remains of about 70 human beings.

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As they left the ceremony, participants placed a piece of greenery, such as grass or leaves, on the white stones covering the burial site. The flag left of the U.S. flag represents the Choctaw-Apache tribe, and the flag to the right of the Texas flag is for the Lipan Apaches.

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Archaeologist Bob Ricklis said that a crew of about 12 people conducted the dig, which took place over a period of about nine months and stopped when they had excavated about one-third of the area at the site. He said the work was like a pregnancy, "but the labor was harder."

Remains were found at Buckeye Knoll that dated as far back as 8,500 years, and artifacts were found that dated as recently as 500 years ago, he said, with the majority of the remains being between 6,300 and 7,000 years old.

For comparison, the remains at Buckeye Knoll site are at least 4,000 years older than the remains returned to Invista's Blue Bayou site in 2004.

However, Ricklis said he found that the culture of the people of Buckeye Knoll was in some ways at least as complex, or more so, than the people at Blue Bayou.

If the Buckeye Knoll site had been discovered in the 1950s, Ricklis said that scientists would have immediately "excavated the whole thing because of its scientific importance" and the remains would have been put on display or stored for long-term study.

Ricklis said he prefers to use the term "complex" rather than "advanced" because "advanced" implies that he is passing judgment.

Nevertheless, "the restoration is a sign of advancement in communi-

cation," he said, because, although scientists would have learned more about the past by digging up the whole site and keeping everything for study and display, it is far more important to accommodate the people who presently have a connection to the dead.

By restoring the remains, "We are giving the proper respect to our forefathers," said Anita Anaya, secretary of the Lipan Apache band.

Larry Running Turtle Salazar of the Gulf Coast Indian Confederation in Corpus Christi said that the most important thing about the restoration "is to keep tradition as it always has been, from genera-

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tion to generation."

"Our children will know how their ancestors lived and died," he said.

Salazar said that his group, composed of eight nations, provided to the Lipan Apaches the deerskins in which the remains were wrapped before the ceremony.

Himself a Mescalero

Apache, Salazar said the restoration was a sign of different tribes "working together - politically, spiritually - we're trying to come to terms economically."

"The old customs are beyond us," said Tommy Bolton, principal chief and tribal chairman of the Choctaw-Apache tribe of Ebarb, in Louisiana. "As

time goes on, we lose more and more."

Bolton said that tribes share pieces of culture to combat this loss. For example, he said, most of the dances performed by tribes nowadays were actually taught to them by people from the Northern Plains.

"We adopted them because we lost what we had," he said.

Bolton, whose tribe contains four families who claim relation to the Lipan Apaches, said, "They are our distant kin. We also learn a little."

And although the people found at Buckeye Knoll are not related to the Lipan Apaches or any current Native American tribe, ac-



Jodi Miller/Advocate Staff Photographer

Daniel Romero Jr., chairman of the Lipan Apache Band of Texas, begins the restoration ceremony by saying a few of his own words and also a prayer that his father wrote.



Jodi Miller/Advocate Staff Photographer

A ceremonial drum was played during the restoration ceremony on Saturday morning at Buckeye Knoll, near the Invista plant in Victoria County.

According to Ricklis ("There is no archaeological link at all. Seven thousand years ago, from an archeological point of view, tribes didn't even exist," he said), the Buckeye Knoll people "possessed the origin of many parts of Native American culture," anthropologist Enrique Maestas said.

"This was here before any building was built that is on this planet," said Maestas, who is Colorado Apache (or Chi'en Nde, in his words). "This is probably the oldest burial ground in North America."

"The remains were placed before the pyramids were built," Romero said.

When the people were first interred at Buckeye Knoll, "No one ever imagined we'd be able to put them back home and learn from them."

"I hope my people will take care of me in the traditional way," he said, motioning toward the restored burial site, "and this is the traditional way."

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