

# New Test Results Deepen Mystery Surrounding Explorer Everett Ruess

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A University of Colorado at Boulder analysis of a skeleton found in Utah that initially indicated the remains were likely that of Southwest artist and poet Everett Ruess, who mysteriously disappeared in the 1930s, now appears to have been incorrect.

Professor Kenneth Krauter of the molecular, cellular and developmental biology department said the CU-Boulder researchers have been unable to replicate the [DNA analysis](#) results from last spring that indicated the bones likely belonged to Ruess. The error in the original testing is believed to be due to an unanticipated weakness in the software used in the analysis.

"The system used was designed for larger quantities of less degraded DNA and in adapting it to the bone fragment material an erroneous result was obtained," he said. "We attempted a novel use of new technology and it appears not to have been up to the task."

Following the initial DNA testing of the bones last spring by CU-Boulder, members of the Ruess family sent additional bone fragments from the remains to the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory, or AFDIL, in Rockville, Md., for a second analysis. After conducting DNA tests on the bone, scientists there concluded that DNA from the [bone fragments](#) was inconsistent with saliva DNA samples provided to both the CU-Boulder lab and the AFDIL by several of Ruess's nieces and nephews, and that the remains likely were not from a Caucasian person.

"This reanalysis of the DNA by AFDIL suggests that our original analysis was incorrect, calling the identity of the skeleton into question," said Krauter. Krauter consulted with the AFDIL labs, and after a series of discussions and re-testing, now concurs with their conclusion that the remains are not likely to be those of Everett Ruess.

"This points out that it is always good to have a second opinion, especially from a group that specializes in these types of analyses," Krauter said.

Prior to the initial [DNA testing](#) by Krauter's lab, a forensic analysis of the remains by CU-Boulder anthropology Professor Dennis Van Gerven indicated the person was a male about the same size, age and sex as Ruess. In addition, a reconstruction of fragile facial bones from the remains superimposed over photographs taken of Ruess in the 1930s indicated the facial features were very similar, said Van Gerven.

"I am sure everyone can appreciate how disappointed we are," said Van Gerven. "We conducted every aspect of the analysis in good faith, and science always marches forward."

The remains were found in 2007 in a crevasse atop a long sandstone ridge near Bluff, Utah, known as Comb Ridge. There had been previous speculation that Ruess had been murdered during his travels and his remains were deposited into the crevasse shortly after the alleged slaying.

"Given the historical and familial importance of secure identification, as well as the importance of the remains themselves, we believe that the Comb Ridge skeleton should be returned to the Navajo Nation for reburial," said Van Gerven.

Ruess was a 20-year-old artist, writer and footloose explorer who

wandered the Southwest in the early 1930s on a burro, striking up friendships with famed photographers like Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange. A woodcut artist, painter and poet, Ruess went missing in 1934 after leaving the town of Escalante, Utah, and his story has spawned a number documentary films, plays and books.

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder ([news](#) : [web](#))

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