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Thursday, November 13, 2008

# Body part to be compared with DNA from family of IRA victim

DAN KEENAN, Northern News Editor

GENETIC EVIDENCE from a body part thought to belong to missing IRA victim Danny McIlhorne will be compared with DNA samples taken from his family members under radical new procedures.

This new database has been introduced by Geoff Knupfer, the forensic specialist called in by the British and Irish governments to help in the search for the bodies of nine people abducted, killed and secretly buried by the IRA more than 20 years ago.

The DNA tests are being carried out by State Pathologist's Office scientists in Dublin and the results will be sent for comparison with the new database at a special laboratory in England. It could take some weeks before a positive identification is made.

It is thought that a foot which was unearthed at Ballynultagh, Co Wicklow last Saturday is that of Mr McIlhorne (19), a west Belfast man who went missing in 1981. It is also understood that a boot and a sock were also found and that attempts are also being made to establish if these belonged to the victim.

The family has expressed hope that the 27-year search for Mr McIlhorne may soon be over. They have also appealed for privacy.

Digging at the site of the discovery in south Wicklow is likely to continue for some weeks. The short winter days and the prospect of wet weather is hampering the dig at the remote site.

However a source close to the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains said the search would continue regardless of the problems encountered.

"There is no deadline," he said. "The commission will continue to return to the site until its work is completed. There are a number of known burial sites and at different phases over the last year and a half we have moved on to each one of those sites and carried out the scientific work," he said.

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"That work is now at different stages . . . so this is a model that will be rolled out at every potential burial site."

The site in Wicklow was described as "difficult terrain".

A special DNA database of the families of other IRA victims known as the Disappeared has already been established and can be used to assist in any other searches for the bodies of other missing people.

Searches are also being carried out at other locations for the nine IRA victims still missing.

Commission investigators are employing specialist techniques at five more suspected burial sites in counties Monaghan, Meath and Louth.

Mr Knupfer, a former specialist detective with the Greater Manchester police, has put together a team of geophysicists and others who are expert in employing hi-tech search techniques and in handling so-called "cadaver dogs", trained in sniffing out human remains.

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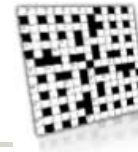
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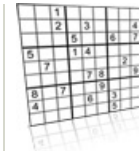
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