

CODIS and the Solving of a Cold Case:

The 1996 Shenandoah National Park Double Murder

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In 1996, two women were murdered while camping in Shenandoah National Park Virginia. The case remained unsolved for nearly three decades until advances in DNA technology and the combined DNA index system allowed investigators to identify the suspect.

DNA sampling is key to identifying the suspect in a case where no Proper suspect can be defined. Evidence recovered from the crime scene can be retested and a DNA profile can be developed from the evidence. The DNA profile can be uploaded into CODIS to produce a match with a convicted offender in the national database. With a DNA match, law enforcement can narrow onto a suspect to confirm for additional testing to confirm guilt. The match was able to link the perpetrator to the crime committed. CODIS is extremely effective at resolving these cold cases.

The murders occurred in May of 1996 at a campsite in Shenandoah National Park. Physical evidence from the crime scene was preserved and decades later. It was reexamined and the evidence collected was prioritized in the investigation. It could be tested with modern technology. The lab successfully extracted DNA and the profile was submitted. Investigators obtained a swab from their primary suspect to compare it to the crime scene DNA and the direct match confirmed that Jackson was the individual whose DNA matched the crime scene evidence. Technological advances can later extract profiles for cases that were once impossible to obtain.

I believe that individuals that are not convicted after a thorough investigation, with no charge or conviction, should have their DNA samples expunged. This will help reduce the risk of wrongful association. Retention should be limited specifically to convicted offenders ensuring that innocent people are not permanently entered into federal or state databases.

References

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2023, February 6). FBI Richmond identifies suspect in 1996 Shenandoah National Park double murder. FBI. <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/richmond/news/fbi-richmond-identifies-suspect-in-1996-shenandoah-national-park-double-murder>

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (n.d.). Combined DNA Index System (CODIS). FBI. <https://le.fbi.gov/science-and-lab/biometrics-and-fingerprints/codis-2>