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National Geographic: Ancient Graves: Voices of the Dead

By Unknown

Ashes to ashes.
Dust to dust.
Death always gets the final word -
no matter how we mock it.
Sworn to eternal silence,
the Dead seem beyond our reach.
Yet to some scientists,
they speak volumes.
"When I look at a mummy,
I'm looking at an encyclopedia."
Through the lens of modern science,
the grave has become
a window on the past.
Today we can learn intimate details
about how the Ancients lived-
and how they died.
"...that's really, that's, that's
really a common way that they did it -
the strangulation
or blows to the head..."
Bit by bit, their portraits emerge
from flesh, bone, and DNA.
"Bringing the people back to life,
I think that that's the fun part of it."
The unearthing of the past reveals
the tangled roots of our family tree.
But some see only the desecration
of their ancestors.
"They must be put back into
the bosom of sacred Mother Earth."
As the Living defend the Dead,
battle lines are drawn.
In truth, those who passed here
long ago still dwell among us.
From fragile remains,
their life stories unfold.
And as we hear them,
they become a part of us all.
Listen now to the voices
of the Dead.
This is the driest place on earth:
the Atacama Desert in Chile.
Life has found a foothold here:
not in the blazing sands,

but in the slender river valleys
that stretch across the desert
from the Andes to the sea.
The city of Arica stands where
two rivers meet the Pacific Ocean.
Countless generations of fishermen
have thrived here,
and many families have deep roots.
Whenever ground is broken,
there's a good chance
these roots may come to light.
The city's arid soil has yielded
several ancient burials,
to the delight of scientists
from the local university.
But physical anthropologist
Bernardo Arriaza,
now with the University of Nevada,
will never forget a visit
to a site where the water company
was digging trenches.
I remembered in 1983,
it was a quiet day
when the water company called us.
They said they had
found something unusual,
so that really caught our interest.
"And we get called all the time,
and you never know
what you're going to find,
so that's also
the exciting part of going.
You don't know
what it's going to be.
And this time it was quite
incredible, actually."
The shovels had exposed a plot
of nearly a hundred mummies.
Some would be dated to
of ancient Egypt.
Eerie masks were sculpted
over their faces.
Wigs were glued
directly to their skulls.

Bodies were completely made over-
paste and paint on the outside,
grasses and earth within.

Men, women and children
were mummified.

Even this eight inch long fetus.
These elaborate mummies were created
by a people called the Chinchorro.
They lived along the coast
in simple huts,
and left little behind-
no monuments, no written texts.

But from their bones and artifacts,
Arriaza has compiled a profile of
their lifestyle.

"The Chinchorro people were fishermen.

They fished from the rocks
with fish hooks made of shells.
They also collected shellfish
and hunted sea lions with harpoons.

And they wove beautiful nets
to gather their food.

Their clothing and ornaments
were minimal.

All their emphasis went into
mummifying the dead"

Why would a simple people
transform their dead
into such elaborate creations?

Arriaza has a theory.

"Someone is being mummified,
it's a lot of energy investment,
it's a lot of caring.

Even the fetuses are fascinating.

Why? Because they have long hair,
they have the mouth open.

That's conveying life.

"We tend to see our dead
as someone that's farther away.

We don't want to see the dead
with open eyes-

no, you think, wow,
that would scare me.

You want to see the dead

completely dead.
In the case of the Chinchorro,
they're seeing the dead
as part of the living."
Virtual works of art, their mummies
were not intended for the grave.
They played an important role
in the very heart of the community.
The mummy was an honored emissary who
moved between this world and the next-
sending word to the ancestors,
interceding before the gods.
The people rendered thanks
with songs and offerings.
Mummification helped ease the loss
of a loved one,
and strengthened bonds
between the living.
It made the community whole again.
Such rituals may have quelled the
awful fear of what lies beyond death-
no less a mystery 7,000 years ago
than today.
One of the earliest expressions
of the human spirit,
death rites date back at least
Even the Neanderthals buried
one of their own
beneath a blanket of flowers.
Every culture on earth
has evolved rituals
to bid a final farewell to the dead.
Some consign the body to
the embrace of the earth.
Others ensure the release
of the soul through fire.
In today's crowded world,
the practice of cremation is on the
rise wherever land is at a premium.
We even send our dead into space.
For about the cost of
a terrestrial burial,
a company in Texas will load
a container of ashes on a small rocket.

After orbiting for several years,
the ashes eventually fall into
Earth's atmosphere and vaporize,
like a tiny shooting star.
It's a fitting twenty-
first century sendoff...
but would have been unthinkable
in one of the greatest civilizations
the Earth has ever known.
The ancient Egyptians believed
the body had to last forever.
Without it,
the deceased could not rise again
in the next world
to enjoy eternal life.
To prevent decay, the bodies of
the dead were drained of moisture,
and reduced to the consistency
of leather.
Everyone wanted to be mummified.
There may have been cut-rate
embalming for the poor,
first-class treatment for the rich.
Even animals were mummified,
to accompany the dead
on their final journey.
Over some thirty centuries,
countless mummies were made.
But countless were also destroyed.
Almost from the moment they were sealed,
the Pyramids and nearly
every other well-
appointed tomb were ransacked
by thieves.
Kings or commoners, bodies were
hacked apart and left in tatters.
Things got worse when Europe
developed a taste for mummies.
By the 12th century,
they were imported by the ton
to be ground up and mixed
in potions purported to cure
everything from headaches to impotence.
In 1798, Napoleon's campaign

spawned a new wave of "mummy-mania."
Over the next century,
hundreds were dissected
both in laboratories
and at fashionable unwrapping parties.
The supply seemed endless.
Mummies made
cheap fertilizer and fuel.
In the 19th century,
trains from Cairo burned stacks of them
to power their steam boilers.
Our fascination with mummies continued
unabashed well into the 20th century.
"Is it dead or alive?
Human or inhuman?
You'll know. You'll see.
You'll feel the awful,
creeping crawling terror
that stands your hair on end
and brings a scream to your lips!
The Mummy!"
Today, Egypt's mummies are treated
as fragile time capsules.
Science now has the tools to explore
their secrets without destroying them.
"Take this side off right here."
Researchers can coax clues
about daily life 3,000 years ago
from the tiniest samples
of tissue and bone.
Egyptologist Bob Brier,
of Long Island University,
knows more than most about mummies.
But just how a mummy became a mummy
was a question that irked him for years.
"The party line
among Egyptologists was always,
'Oh we know how they did it,
they removed the brain through the nose,
they removed the internal organs.
We know pretty much how they did it.'
But there's no papyrus
that tells how to mummify a human.
The Egyptians never wrote down

how they did it.
It was a secret,
probably a trade secret."
A brief description was recorded by
Greek historian Herodotus around 450 BC.
For Brier,
it was not the final word.
I started to do
a mental mummification,
trying to just imagine exactly
what happened.
At some point I realized,
the only way we'll ever really
find out is to do it."
In 1994, Brier set about to perform
the first Egyptian-
style mummification
in two thousand years.
In Cairo, he tracked down
the embalming spices
mentioned by Herodotus,
including frankincense and myrrh.
He would also need special equipment.
"We had to have replica tools
made of all the instruments
we thought the embalmers used.
So for example,
we had to have obsidian,
an obsidian blade flaked by somebody
in the Southwest
who knew how to do this.
We had to have a silversmith
make bronze tools
just like ancient Egyptian
bronze tools."
"Not since the time of Sneferu
has its like been done.
Now I'm a little bigger than
the average Egyptian..."
Copying ancient designs,
Brier built an embalming board
for the elevation of the corpse
and drainage of fluids.
"And I'll tell you,

it might be good for the dead,
but it's not good for the living."
With his colleague Ronald Wade, at the
University of Maryland Medical School,
Brier would mummify a man
who had donated his remains to science.
"There were quite a few surprises
along the way
as we did the mummification.
One was in removing the brain.
Everybody always thought that
you kind of pull the brain out
a piece at a time through the nose,
at least that's how
all the articles say it was done.
We tried it,
it didn't come out that way."
"What we figured out,
what the Ancient Egyptians did was
they inserted a long hook
and then moved it around,
using it like a whisk.
And then broke down the brain until-
it was almost like
a, a milk shake consistency,
and then turned the cadaver
upside down, and then the brain ran out.
That's how they did it."
Internal organs were removed through an
incision made with an obsidian blade -
sharp as any modern scalpel.
Then the body was covered with
several hundred of pounds of natron -
a naturally occurring salt,
Brier had imported from Egypt.
Internal organs
were treated separately.
Left in place for about a month,
the natron was supposed to leach
all moisture from the body.
For Brier,
the suspense was overwhelming.
"What would we get?
Would it look like a mummy?"

Or would it need another 3,000 years before it looked like the things in the museums?"

"One of the things that was really almost shocking was when we took the natron off, we had a mummy."

A striking demonstration that people are mostly water, the body would shrink from more than

"What are the oils in it, Bob?"

"The oils are frankincense, myrrh oil, palm oil, lotus oil, and cedar oil.

There are five that I got."

Brier anointed the body with oils considered sacred by the Egyptians, then began wrapping.

"Nice and tight."

Accurate to the last detail, he used more than a hundred yards of pure linen

inscribed with Egyptian spells.

Internal organs were placed in replica funerary jars, created by local college students.

"It's been perfumed and now it's going to be wrapped and we place it inside the jar."

"A lot of people don't realize that we did the project not to get the mummy, but to get knowledge.

And the project isn't over.

Our mummy, it seems, is what we say, dead and well.

He's been at room temperature now for about two years, no signs of decay, it's stable.

So we think we did it right.

But he's still being used in research projects around the world.

We get requests for tissue samples, from people doing studies on ancient Egyptian mummies.

This is the only mummy in the world for which we know exactly what was done to him. It's the only, so to speak, ancient Egyptian mummy that we have a full medical record on. So it's an important mummy." If only in the annals of science, Brier's mummy has achieved immortality- a fate the Egyptians would surely have approved. The quest for eternal life still goes on today- just in a different form. Cryonics involves freezing the body in liquid nitrogen immediately after death. Practitioners have faith that scientists of the future will have the know-how to revive them. The sad truth is the human body- about two thirds water, plus a few basic chemicals- is simply not built to last. Exposed in warm weather, a corpse could be reduced to a skeleton in a matter of weeks. Underground, or underwater, the process usually takes somewhat longer. Bone may last from months to millennia. But when conditions are just right, Nature makes mummies. In northwest China, near the route of the fabled Silk Road, the searing sands have yielded more than a hundred heat-dried mummies. Surprisingly, they have the features of Caucasians, and date back two to four thousand years. Many must have lived in the region centuries

before the opening of
the Silk Road around 200 BC.
Scholars had long been puzzled
by ancient Chinese texts
describing figures of great height,
with red or yellow hair.
Cave paintings in the region lent
credence to the accounts,
but the discovery of the mummies adds
an important piece to the puzzle.
Their existence suggests
foreign traders settled in China
much earlier than previously believed.
The bogs of northern Europe
have long inspired legends-
among them the "boogie-man."
Two thousand years ago,
the Celts and their kin believed bogs
were an entrance to
the realm of the gods.
They tossed in tribute
of silver and gold-
and other strange sacrifices.
Bogs are filled with
a natural "embalming fluid",
acidic water low in oxygen
and rich with tannins,
the same chemicals
used to cure leather.
Over time, this brew converts
dead vegetation into peat,
long harvested as a heating fuel.
It also works wonders on bodies.
More than a thousand "bog mummies"
have come to light;
most are some 2,000 years old.
Often, their bones are dissolved,
while their skin is transformed
into a supple leather that retains
a breathtaking impression of life.
Many bog mummies bear signs
of a violent death-
slit throat, strangulation,
or hanging.

Many scholars believe they were
sacrificed to fertility gods
by early farming communities.
They were plunged into the bog,
so the wheat would rise again.
More than 2,500 years ago,
the Altai mountains of Siberia
were home to a nomadic people
called the Pazyryk.
They lived by the horse,
and moved great herds across the land
in search of pasture.
Horses were their measure
of wealth and status.
The Pazyryk buried their dead in
chambers dug deep into the icy earth.
In 1993, Russian archeologists
opened an undisturbed chamber.
First, they found the remains of
six horses killed by blows to the head.
Surely, they thought, this must be
the tomb of a powerful man.
The coffin itself was
completely sealed in ice.
To everyone's surprise,
it contained a young woman-
her features gone,
but her body intact.
Tattoos of mythical creatures
adorned her sturdy hands.
Was she a Priestess? Warrior? Healer?
Her identity eludes us,
but she provides a new image of women
in this ancient culture.
On the west coast of Greenland,
a rocky cove once harbored
an Eskimo village,
home to a people called the Inuit.
Some five hundred years ago,
misfortune struck here,
and eight bodies were laid
to rest in a dry, sheltering cave.
Cause of death remains a mystery.
But these freeze? dried mummies,

in superb fur clothing,
rank as one of the most spectacular
archeological finds
from the arctic region.
The frozen heights of the Andes
preserve a record of the past.
Five hundred years ago,
the Inca ruled these highlands,
and worshiped the mountains as gods.
Traces of their sacred sites are
scattered throughout the peaks.
For nearly two decades,
anthropologist Johan Reinhard
has sought out the high altitude
sites of the Inca.
But in September 1995,
he first climbed Mount Ampato in Peru
with a different goal in mind.
"Ampato's been a peak
that's always been a mystery.
It's always stood out there and people
haven't really climbed it very often
and haven't seen much
that's been on it."
"And the idea was just to get
some pictures of another volcano
that was erupting nearby,
never really thinking we'd find
anything on the summit.
Now the reason for that is is that
it's never been seen
without a permanent
snow-capped summit."
The eruption had showered
Ampato with dark ash.
Even at more than 20,000 feet,
much of the snow had melted.
When my assistant, Miguel Zarate,
and I, we reached the summit,
I was taking some notes when
Miguel just continued on and,
all of a sudden,
gave a whistle and pointed.
And I looked and, sure enough, it was

clear from even, forty, fifty feet away,
that there were feathers
sticking out of the slope."
They adorned three Inca figurines
once buried, now exposed by a rockslide.
"We were still looking down the slope
and very quickly saw this bundle,
laying right out on the ice.
I asked Miguel to pick it up
and move it a bit.
And as he did, all of a sudden
we were looking into the face
of this dead young woman."
Mummified by the cold,
she had been sacrificed and buried
on the mountaintop
some five hundred years ago.
When her rocky tomb collapsed,
her face was exposed to the sun.
But her body was
intact-skin, muscle, bone,
even the blood in her veins
frozen solid.
Scientists estimate she was twelve
to fourteen years old when she died.
Never before had
the richly patterned clothing
of an Inca noble woman
come to light.
She is probably
the best-preserved mummy
ever discovered in the Americas.
In May 1996, the Maiden is flown,
still frozen,
to Johns Hopkins University
in Baltimore.
A state-of-the-art CAT scanner
produces a detailed three-dimensional
image of her body.
Her strong bones and teeth,
well-formed muscles and internal organs
speak volumes about
Inca nutrition and health.
It's a stunning sight for the man

who carried her down the mountain.
Then Johan Reinhard learns
the secret of the Maiden's death.
A fatal two-inch fracture
mars her skull.

"You can see it pretty nicely
just rotating it around but, uh,
would it, would it make sense
that she may have been hit by a blow?"

"Absolutely, that's, that's really
a common way that they did it-
the strangulation and blows
to the heads
were, were common ways
to do human sacrifice.
We just didn't see it."

"I kept having visions of what
it was like carrying her in the dark,
with the volcano and snowfall
and everything.

And seeing this modern machinery
and you could look at the screen
and view bones and even organs.

It was just amazing,
she just began to come alive."
To the Inca, human sacrifice
was the ultimate offering,
an act of gratitude when the gods
were generous;
a desperate plea
when they were angry.

Archeologists now know
the Ampato Maiden died
during a long-term volcanic eruption.

The cataclysm could have had
devastating effects on the region.

Daily showers of hot ash.

Air thick with smoke.

Water sources poisoned.

Crops and livestock decimated.

A circle of priests
would have led the Maiden
to the highest reaches
of Mount Ampato.

It was a grueling climb that took days.
She alone shouldered the fate
of her family and her people.
To be thus chosen was a great honor.
In exchange for her life,
she would earn an eternity of bliss
and a place among the gods.
Soon after she died,
the eruption spent itself,
and the snows returned to Ampato,
sealing the Maiden in ice
for the next five centuries.
Even now, she serves her people well.
"She's providing us
with so much information,
that I hope that we are
giving back something to her
by deepening our respect
and understanding for the culture
that she came from,
and the Inca civilization
five hundred years ago."
Across the globe,
another chain of snowy peaks
yields a messenger from the past.
The Alps seem impenetrable
from the air.
But for millennia,
shepherds and traders
have hiked their mountain passes.
Today's trekkers are mostly tourists.
Every year, millions enjoy the alpine
splendors of southern Austria.
In the fall of 1991,
unusual weather turns snow to slush.
On September 19th,
a couple of hikers stray from a marked
trail, hoping to find a shortcut.
Instead, in a melting glacier
at more than 10,000 feet,
they spot something that stops them
in their tracks.
Four days later,
delayed by bad weather,

an Austrian forensic team arrives.
This is not an uncommon sight
in the Alps.
The frozen bodies of mountaineers
are sometimes found decades
after they perish among the peaks.
But this body is so deeply icebound
the team borrows an ice axe
and ski pole from a passing hiker.
Somewhat puzzling
are the scraps of leather
pulled from the slush around the body.
Not to mention the strange artifacts.
Team members conclude this body
has been frozen a very long time.
They turn it over to experts
at the University of Innsbruck.
Still wearing a strange shoe
stuffed with grass,
it's the body of
a 25 to 40 year old man,
shriveled but virtually intact.
Teeth show heavy wear.
Simple blue tattoos
adorn his lower back and legs.
Seventy objects were found
near his body.
A quiver of animal skin
containing fourteen arrows.
A leather waist pouch,
not unlike a "fanny pack."
Bits of leather and grass rope.
A flint dagger.
Most telling, an axe
with an exquisite copper blade.
To archeologists,
the design of the blade
suggests its owner
may have died 4,000 years ago.
It was not the final word.
Skin, bone and grass samples
are sent to four eminent European
laboratories for radiocarbon dating.
All four conclude the Iceman

died about 5,300 years ago-
which makes him the oldest
frozen mummy ever found.
Almost immediately, word gets out.
The University of Innsbruck is overrun,
and a humble man from the Copper Age
becomes an overnight sensation.
Few archeological discoveries have
so completely dominated the headlines.
Nicknamed after the Otztal Alps,
"Otzi" provides endless inspiration
to local entrepreneurs.
Who was he? How did he die?
We may never know.
But his body and artifacts
have begun to yield glimpses
of a lifestyle practiced
more than 5,000 years ago.
X-rays speak of lifelong

physical stress:

broken ribs, heavily worn joints,
arthritis.
In his left foot
With an endoscope,
scientists remove a sample
from the Iceman's stomach
and found remnants of meat and grain-
his last meal.
His lungs made a startling sight,
blackened
by hours spent near open fires,
in close, smoky quarters.
Clinging to tatters of
the Iceman's fur clothing,
grains of primitive wheat suggest
he had passed through a farming
community near harvest time.
Found frozen in the snow
near his body,
a sloe berry also helped pinpoint
the season of his death:
the fruit ripens in early autumn.
At the discovery site, now determined

to be inside the Italian border,
researchers sifted through
six hundred tons of snow.
After days of melting and filtering,
they recovered part
of a plaited grass cloak.
Another fragment,
the upper edge of the cloak,
held hairs that fell from
the Iceman's head after death.
Chemical analysis would show the hair
was heavily coated with copper particles
the kind that are airborne
near the smelting of copper ore.
Not an unusual finding-
if the Iceman was a coppersmith,
or an assistant to one.
Finally, every last inch
of the Iceman's body
became digital information,
in a three? dimensional CAT scan.
This "virtual Iceman"
allows for unlimited study
without risking the fragile,
frozen remains.
It also provides a ghostly
foundation for a skilled artist,
as he resurrects a traveler
from a distant time.
Something drives him
to the heights-trade or duty.
He may be a renegade on the run.
He knows the mountains well,
but fails to heed the warning signs.
Perhaps he has no choice
but to press on.
He climbs higher than the trees,
beyond hope of any kindling to build
a fire against the terrible cold.
In the lee of a rocky ridge,
he'll lay down his belongings
and wait out the night.
He knows that with sleep
comes certain death.

But his senses are already numbed.
His lonely death deprived him
of funeral rites by his people.
But this everyday man,
frozen in time on his way somewhere,
has helped write a new chapter
on daily life in prehistoric Europe.
In southwest England,
Somerset is a region of limestone
cliffs and deep gorges.
Home to some 3,000 people,
the town of Cheddar is known
not just for its namesake cheese,
but for a series of spectacular caves
sculpted by an underground river.
Some 9,000 years ago,
Ice Age hunters camped here,
and left one of their dead
in the damp darkness.
Today a replica of "Cheddar Man"
marks the spot.
He lived before the age of farming,
when bears and wolves roamed the land.
The oldest complete skeleton
found in England,
it seems Cheddar Man died of
head injuries around age 40.
In 1996, a fragment
from his tooth was analyzed
by scientists at Oxford University.
The ancient bone
yielded traces of DNA.
A tiny fraction of Cheddar Man's
genetic fingerprint was revealed.
A local television producer
decided to test whether
any of Cheddar Man's descendants
were still living in the area today.
The high school became involved
in his experiment.
Students from local families
were asked to donate DNA samples.
Why are those two unpopular
and who are they unpopular with?

History teacher Adrian Targett,
himself a native of
the Somerset region,
helped coordinate the volunteers.
A simple cheek swab was all it took
to collect the necessary cells
for DNA analysis.
To make up an even twenty,
Targett donated a sample, too.
At Oxford University,
the DNA was parsed and sorted.
Within weeks, results were in.
"On the basis of what we've got here,
that would be an identical match
which would mean that they had
a common maternal ancestor.
So, who do we match this up with?
Let's see..."
"Number 12."
"Number 12, so who's number 12?"
On a Friday afternoon, the volunteers
were assembled to hear the news.
"You're all agog, no doubt,
to know who it is?
Who is related to the cave man
found in Cheddar? Yes?
What would it feel like
if it was one of you?
Because it's probably going to be
of interest to people
all over the world that there is
a link, over 9,000 years,
to this person found in the cave.
Think you could stand the publicity
and visits to California and wherever?
Yes? So, who is it?
It's Adrian Targett!"
"Thank you very much!"
"This is the man that's
closest related to Cheddar Man."
"I'm overwhelmed!"
"How do you feel about that?"
"A bit surprised! I was just about,
about to say, 'I hope it's not me!'"

"Adrian, what was your instant reaction when you were told that you had this amazing line back 9,000 years to a caveman?"

"Well, it was a great shock, but then I realized that was why I had been put in next to the person who was doing the filming." The study of "dead DNA" is becoming a powerful tool for unraveling relationships long buried in the past. It can help illuminate patterns of gene flow between ancient populations, or family ties among rulers in a bygone dynasty.

DNA gave this man the oldest documented pedigree in the world. But there's more to it for Adrian Targett. It's essentially about our roots and connections and families, and I think, at heart, most people want to know more about themselves, where they come from, and of course this story does just that."

The goal of archeology is to understand our past. Much of what we know about long vanished peoples comes from the excavation of their graves. This work has shed light on the very roots of humanity. But it has also disturbed the sacred sites of earlier cultures. In recent years, the collecting and handling of human remains have become more controversial, as native peoples around the world demand a new respect for their ancestors. The conflict is especially heated in North America.

In the last century, countless Indian burials have been stripped bare. Today, museums and institutes across the United States house the remains of some 300,000 Native Americans. In 1927, this thousand-year-old burial site in Illinois was opened to the public. The Dickson Mounds Museum would prosper. But in the 1980s, Native Americans registered complaints about the exposed skeletons. By the 1990s, protests were held outside the museum. "...in our own land. So this movement, the American Indian movement, is said to be first a spiritual movement." To political activist Vernon Bellecourt, of the Ojibwa tribe, and to many others, the burial display was deeply disturbing. "We practice our spiritual way of life. We still have our language, our prayer songs and, and many of us who follow the traditional teachings of our, of our grandfathers and grandmothers, we then take exception when we see our burial sites being desecrated and the physical remains of our ancestors who are in an open burial pit for tourists and others to witness. We decided to take some direct action." In 1991, Bellecourt and four other activists were forcibly removed

from the museum for attempting
to rebury the skeletons.
One year later, museum officials
closed the display,
and completely covered it with earth.
Under a law passed in 1990,
federally funded institutions
have begun to return Indian remains
to their tribes.
Native peoples
in Australia, New Zealand,
Africa and elsewhere are calling
for similar policies.
Across time and space,
the voices of the dead still reach us-
in the most surprising ways.
In 1991, a British housewife purchased
a book at an antique market
near her home
in the town of Bromsgrove.
Since childhood,
Elizabeth Knight had been captivated
by Native American culture.
Her new book included a 1920s essay
about an Indian chief
who visited London-
and never returned home.
It was the story of Chief Long Wolf.
Legend has it, he was a seasoned Sioux
warrior who fought at Little Big Horn.
Documents suggest he was one of
several Indian "prisoners of war"
released by the US Government
to the custody of Buffalo Bill Cody.
In 1892, Cody's Wild West Show
toured Europe.
Chief Long Wolf, at age 59,
was the oldest performer in the troupe.
In London, the show was applauded
by Queen Victoria.
But Long Wolf developed pneumonia.
As he lay dying,
he asked his wife to take his body
back to the land of his ancestors.

But on June 13th, he was buried,
under the sign of the wolf,
in London's Brompton Cemetery.
His wife and child returned home.
In time, his gravesite was forgotten.
The chief's final wish
touched Elizabeth deeply.
"I had the book for
a couple of weeks and,
I put the book back
on the shelf several times,
but eventually I had to take it down
and said to my husband,
'I'll have to do something about this
because it's really bothering me.'"'
Some 35,000 gravestones rise
from the grounds of Brompton Cemetery.
On May 1, 1992, Elizabeth
searched the aisles
until she found the weathered wolf.
"I made a vow to try and help him.
To try and find his family, because I
knew his spirit would forever wander."
Half a world away, in Tempe, Arizona,
Long Wolf was far from forgotten.
A retired mechanic, John Black Feather
was born and raised in South Dakota,
not far from the site of Wounded Knee.
John had always known his great
grandfather was buried in London-
but he had no idea exactly where.
"I've been hearing about Long Wolf
ever since I was about five years old.
My mother always talked about
trying to find him but still,
we didn't know how to go
about finding him.
That's like looking for
a needle in a haystack."
In 1992,
John's wife spotted a newspaper
article that changed everything.
Elizabeth Knight's letter
marked the beginning of four years

of planning and fundraising.

"Maybe you should writer her, a letter to her right away and see what..."

"I always knew that

he would one day come home.

I never thought I'd be involved with it a hundred years later, but, I did."

September 25th, 1997.

The Black Feather family come to London to claim one of their own.

"It's not a sad day for us.

It's, it's, it's gonna be like a great homecoming for him

when we get him back to South Dakota."

For Elizabeth Knight it is a day of promises kept.

"This is a moment of resolution, of achievement, and blessing."

"It was the most extraordinary day of my life.

And I'm sure Long Wolf's spirit was there."

On September 28th, 1997,

Long Wolf is laid to rest in a small cemetery in Wolf Creek, South Dakota.

His descendants reenact an ancient rite, this gesture of love beyond death.

More than anything else, it may be what makes us human.

We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.

We walk in their footsteps.

We live on their graves.

Each time we speak their names, or honor their ways,

perhaps they do live again.

To be remembered, and nothing more.

That alone may be the secret to immortality.