



Ashes amid the ashes: Experts find loved ones' cherished remains in urns buried amid wildfire rubble

Archeologists work with dogs to recover human cremated remains.

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Click on the picture to read the news article.

What is it Like to do Cremains Recovery Work

Doing cremains recovery work is truly a bonding human experience. It's an act of kindness for grieving families who have lost so much. It's about bonding and giving people the simple joy of returning something important that they thought was lost. Sharing sadness and joy with complete strangers who become friends. We are volunteer archaeologists, students, dog handlers, and support people, who have joined together for a single purpose; giving away our unique ability to find cremains after a wildfire disaster. Together we have built a unique family where all of us understand what it's like to help others in need. For some of us, it's also a family reunion, working again with people who we have worked with in previous fires, returning cremains. It's not glamorous work. It's the most exhausting, emotionally draining, sad, joyful, and rewarding thing we have ever done.

~Adela~



There is not much of a better feeling than giving the cremains of a loved one back to the family.





Teams are made up of a lead archaeologist with experience doing cremains recovery, two or more other archaeologists or students learning how to recover cremains, and a dog team.



Seeing friends we have not seen since the last fire.



The bond between dog and handler is strong.

Clean Up



Photo by Sarah Reingewirtz, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG

Bodie

When it rains after a house fire, the sheetrock turns into a very sticky clay-like substance that gets on everything. Our boots, with the caked-on sheetrock, makes us several inches taller. The dog's feet and legs also get covered.



Bodie, Cedar and Nico

We usually work a three-day shift. Our schedule each day works 3 homes per team (2-3 archaeologists & 1 canine team). Depending on the difficulty of the site (how many stories, basement, construction type, sets of cremains and terrain), it can take up to 2.5 hours to complete the recovery. We meet with families at their burned-out home. Sometimes we are lucky and the cremains are where they were last seen and are easily found. But when the cremains have dropped and scattered or are buried deep, it can take several hours to locate them. After completing our houses for the day, we start the process of cleaning up. We have already located a place to wash our dogs, sometimes it's a fire station and sometimes it's a pet store, We hose off our boots and equipment, find something to eat, sleep, and then the next morning we start all over again. After our three-day shift, everyone returns home to their regular job

and responsibilities of life at home. Our volunteers have traveled from California, Oregon, and Arizona.

Donate to AHF Cremains Recovery Efforts

An entire group, made up of dog teams (handler + canine) and archaeologists, spent February 17-20, including travel time, volunteering with Alta Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Canine Forensics. They were in Southern California locating and recovering the previously cremated remains of loved ones lost in the ashes of homes burned in the Palisades and Eaton fires. All expenses for these trips are borne by the volunteers ... travel, lodging, meals, etc. A typical 3-day rotation runs approximately \$1,000. Donations toward our efforts can be made at <https://altahf.org>, a 501(c)(3), and are tax deductible.



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We are happy to talk with you about your project and how our dogs might help locate human remains or burials. Call, email, or check us out on Facebook or our website. (You can find past newsletters there, too.)

Please feel free to pass this newsletter along to anyone who might be interested.

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