

Field Museum to return Maori remains to New Zealand

Te Papa Tongarewa, the national museum in Wellington, will hold them until they can be identified

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The Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago is to return the remains of 14 Maoris to New Zealand, concluding three years of negotiations with Te Papa Tongarewa, the national museum in Wellington. The decision was announced by museum trustees in March during a visit to Chicago by New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark.

John Terrell, curator of Pacific Anthropology, said the Maori remains, which include parts of 13 skulls, were purchased in the late 19th century from a New York scientific supply company, but he does not know how the firm obtained them. “We don’t know who they are—in most cases we don’t even have a clue. But the reality is that we agree they need to go home,” he said.

The museum is also returning a preserved tattooed human head acquired in 1958.

Dr Terrell says that a Maori delegation is expected to travel to Chicago in September to retrieve the remains. These will be taken to the national marae (meeting ground) at Te Papa Tongarewa and held there until the tribal identities of the individuals can be established.

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