

## Profs Unearth Secrets of the Dead on *The Mummy Road Show*

Not many universities can boast of having television celebrities as full-time faculty members. But that's the case at Quinnipiac University, where professors Gerald "Jerry" Conlogue and Ronald "Ron" Beckett are also the popular hosts of National Geographic's *The Mummy Road Show*. Now in its second season, the program has taken the two around the world to unravel mummy mysteries.

Using modern-day x-ray and endoscopy techniques, the pair have inspected mummies for their cause of death, determined their sex and approximate age, gained insights into their diet, and discovered if they suffered from diseases like arthritis and tuberculosis. The outcome of each investigation is as unique as each mummy.

Conlogue, assistant professor and director of the diagnostic imaging program, said that the episodes lift the shrouds of mystery that have surrounded the mummies for hundreds of years.

"All of these people had stories," he said. "When we inspect them, they help tell these stories."

Beckett agreed that telling tales of times past by using modern technology is an exciting way to uncover how ancient people lived – and died. "We discover some of the interesting facts about an individual, and they become not a mummy anymore but the person they were in life," he said.

Conlogue is the more experienced mummy inspector of the two, having x-rayed hundreds of specimens during his 23-year career. He teamed up with Beckett, the director of the respiratory care program and chairman of cardiopulmonary sciences and diagnostic imaging, in 1992. Both have since become pioneers in the new scientific field of paleo-imaging, and also co-direct the university's Bioanthropology Research Institute. In addition, Conlogue works at the State Medical Examiner's office several days a week and teaches a forensic imaging course at the University of Connecticut.

The team examines mummies three ways. The first is simple observation. Conlogue then takes a series of x-rays, and Beckett performs an endoscopy by inserting a tube in a clear opening, which allows him to videotape the inside of the mummy.

Conlogue said that there is no shortage of mummies to investigate. Season three, which starts this fall, has already been filmed and "there are about 41 new program ideas currently in the works, which could include trips to Cambodia and Nubia, a place we've never visited." This summer, he and Beckett are off to Peru to unwrap clues to 2,000 mummies.

Both admitted that juggling their personal, professional, and academic lives can be challenging. "For the most part, the filming fits into our teaching schedules," Beckett said. "We even take our kids along when we can. This work is a joy to share with kids and with the scientific community."

The program is particularly popular with youngsters. "We get a lot of fan mail from sixth and seventh graders," Conlogue said. "One interviewer even wanted an autograph for his four-year-old."

Conlogue said that the show also has loyal fans in Asia and Europe, where a 24-hour "mummy marathon" recently aired. The show now airs in 133 countries.

While both said it's difficult to come up with a favorite mummy story, the mummy of a Buddhist monk, dead for just 30 years, is among the more interesting. "The monk actually meditated himself into a mummified state by slowing down his intake of food and water over 15 days," Conlogue said. The Philadelphia "soap lady," an obese woman whose mummified flesh resembles soap, is another.

Conlogue and Beckett have also enjoyed unmasking the fanciful life tales associated with circus sideshow mummies. The two have unearthed that more often than not, these mummies "were probably homeless people." The information they've uncovered might even be the subject of a future book.

Their investigations have also taught these dissectors of the dead some life lessons of their own.

"Life is too short, so we seize the chance to do different things," Conlogue said. "Many people wake up in the morning and don't come home at night."

To learn more about *The Mummy Road Show*, visit [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com).

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