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New methods bring hope to relatives

By Staff reporter

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INVESTIGATORS who uncovered the partial remains of IRA murder victim Danny McIlhone in Co Wicklow are using their ground-breaking methods at five other potential burial sites, it emerged last night.

A special DNA database has also been set up of all the families of the so-called Disappeared as part of a new scientific approach that is hoped will finally lead to the bodies of those still missing.

DNA tests are being carried out on a human foot, a boot and a sock discovered in the Wicklow Mountains on Saturday believed

to be that of 19 year-old McIlhone, who vanished from west Belfast in 1981.

They are trying to identify the complex genetic code of the partial remains which will be sent to a forensic science laboratory in England where the special Disappeared database is housed.

If it matches with samples already taken from Mr McIlhone's family it will positively identify the remains as that of the missing teenager and end decades of misery and uncertainty for his relatives.

It will also spark fresh hopes for other families who have suffered the same agony.

Investigators have already rolled out their new techniques at five more suspected burial locations in Counties Monaghan, Meath and Louth.

They are also to begin similar strategies at two other sites in the Republic as well as at a forest near Rouen in northern France, where it is believed INLA victim Seamus Ruddy is buried.

The Independent Commission on the Location of Victims Remains, which was set up in 1999 by the British and Irish governments to

locate the bodies of those abducted, murdered and secretly buried during the Troubles, are still searching for the remains of nine victims.

These include Mr McIlhone, Seamus Wright, Kevin McKee, Columba McVeigh, Brendan Megraw – all of whom the IRA has admitted killing and dumping in unmarked graves.

Other cases, such as the 1977 murder of undercover British agent Robert Nairac, Charles Armstrong and Gerard Evans who vanished from Co Armagh, and Mr Ruddy are also being examined.

Excavation of the site at Ballynultagh, meanwhile, on the side of

Wicklow's second highest peak,

Mullaghcleevaun, is still continuing in a further search for remains

following the discovery on Saturday.

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