

A MAN HUNTER'S STORY

ALEX RILEY IN RETIREMENT

by

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of the "Sydney Morning Herald"

Ex-Sergeant Tracker Alex Riley, of Dubbo, has done more to solve major crime, recapture gaol-breakers, and save lives than any other coloured man in this State.

Almost everyone in Dubbo knows Alex Riley, who retired several years ago after forty years' service in the N.S.W. police force.

"A white man," they'll tell you, when they talk about him.

Alex Riley smiles when he hears it. He understands that a compliment is intended, and he's tolerant.

Alex Riley was generally considered the State's most outstanding black-tracker.



Ex-Sergeant Alex Riley.

He was the first to be promoted to the rank of sergeant, and in 1943 he was awarded the King's Police and Fire Services' Medal.

He has tracked down and rescued more than twenty lost people in as many years.

When I interviewed him last week, he was digging out rabbits at Terramungamine Station, near Dubbo.

Here is his story, as he told it to me:—

"Credit for any skill I had as a tracker goes to a tribe of full-blooded blacks who roamed the bush near Condobolin sixty years ago.

"We lived at the Mission Station, but I liked to hunt with the full-bloods. When I was 8 years of age they started to teach me how to track.

"They first showed me how to recognise the hoofs of police horses—by the way they were shod. They always knew when a trooper was in the locality.

"I was horse-breaking until I joined the police at the age of 26 years.

"I got most satisfaction out of finding people who were missing or lost. Catching criminals was interesting, but it never really appealed to me.

"Now that I am out of the force I will stick to bush work, but if they want me back on any job I'll help in any work except investigation of crime."

Saved Lost Girl

On Christmas Eve of 1918 a six-year-old girl was lost in rugged bush and barren mountains near Stuart Town.

Alex Riley arrived on the scene at daylight, and later that day he found the exhausted child in a gully, bogged to her waist in thick mud.

He gave her milk from a bottle he always carried when searching for lost people.

She is now a school teacher.

On Christmas Eve of 1940, Desmond Clark, 2½ years, was lost in dense scrub at Bugaldi. Months went past without trace of the child.