

POLICE TRACKERS

The Final Jottings from Ex-Sergeant-Tracker Riley's Scrapbook

Sgt.-Tracker Riley featured in one of the greatest murder mystery cases of its kind that the State criminal records have known. This occurred in 1939 :—

Three men, Robinson, O'Shea and Bartley disappeared under unusual circumstances. Riley was with Detective-Sergeant G. Frankish and Detective J. A. Burke when they arrested Andrew Moss near Troy.

For months, scores of police, aided by Riley, scoured hundreds of miles of the countryside around Dubbo, Narromine, Gilgandra, Trangie and Peak Hill in search of the body of Thomas Robinson. The investigations showed that a man named Timothy O'Shea had disappeared mysteriously and still later a man named Victor Bartley was found to be among the missing.

Riley found the remains of a very old fire on Mack's Reserve, near Narromine, and from it he scraped pieces of human teeth. Near the river he found a piece of bone, a fragment of a human spinal cord. It was portion of the charred remains of O'Shea whose body had been burned in the fire found by Riley and the remains scraped up and thrown into the swift running river.

Later Riley tracked down the movements of two men. One set of tracks showed where Bartley had last camped, and evidence there gathered left no doubt that he, too, had been murdered.

Moss was committed to stand his trial at Dubbo on three charges of murder. He was convicted and sentenced to death at the Dubbo Supreme Court, but the sentence was commuted to one of life imprisonment. Moss feigned insanity during the hearing and provided a court sensation by using indecent language and tearing the clothing from his body.

In the year 1940, what became known as the Bugaldi Mystery was solved :—

The remains of a child were discovered by Tracker Riley on Tuesday morning, at about 10 o'clock, within 100 yards from the top of a chalk mountain. Tracker Riley's theory is that the gorges running down from the mountain coaxed the child up, and he was just strong enough to climb out of them.

He was lying up-hill on his back, fully dressed with his little tunic and trousers, and the bones were in his clothing. The skull had fallen away from his body, and was lying alongside, but was partly submerged in the dirt.

Portion of a leg and foot were missing, together with some other bones, which foxes had carried away. Cadet Murray found the shoe and sock, with the foot inside, about 50 yards away. The other bones were picked up by Trackers Riley and Peckham.

The police were at once apprised of the discovery, and the Dubbo Police Superintendent's Office communicated with.

The Government Medical Officer at Coonabarabran, together with Mr. George McNaboe (Coroner), Sergeant Forsyth and Constable Pickering, arrived on the scene shortly after the discovery was made known, and were present when the missing foot and other bones were discovered.

The body and clothing were packed in a box and conveyed to Coonabarabran, where they were identified by the child's mother, father, step-sister and grandmother. The ill-fated child was on a visit from Tambar Springs to his grandmother at Bugaldi at the time of his disappearance, the circumstances of which had already been fully published.

Drawing deductions from the evidence he could gather, Tracker Riley said it would appear that the child climbed out of a gorge and was sitting up in a narrow depression, when he fell back as the result of his exhausting experience, combined with the intense heat wave on Christmas Day. There was no evidence of foul play, declared Tracker Riley.

It will be remembered, that at the time of the child's disappearance, and when a vigorous search of the locality for miles around failed to reveal his whereabouts, a theory that found much favour was that he was carried up into an eagle's nest.

By a remarkable coincidence, an eagle-hawk's nest was found in a tree on the Monday, about 200 yards from where the body was recovered on the following morning. Tracker Riley shot the eagle-hawk which was sitting on the nest, with a rifle, and Peckham and Murray climbed up with difficulty to find that the nest contained two large eggs, but no sign of any bones. There was no evidence, said Tracker Riley, to show that eagle-hawks interfered with the body in any way.