



MAGISTRATES COURT of TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

*Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11*

I, Simon Cooper, Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of Peter Henrich,

Find, pursuant to Section 28(1) of the Coroners Act 1995, that

- a) The identity of the deceased is Peter Henrich;
- b) While satisfied that Mr Henrich is dead, I am unable to determine the particular circumstances of his death;
- c) I am unable to determine the cause of Mr Henrich's death; and
- d) Mr Henrich died between 2 November 2017 and 3 January 2018, at or near Poatina, Tasmania.

Why Mr Henrich's disappearance is being investigated

1. The *Coroners Act 1995* governs the investigation of deaths in Tasmania. Section 21(1) of the Act provides that “[a] coroner has jurisdiction to investigate a death if it appears to the coroner that the death is or may be a reportable death.” ‘Death’ is defined in section 3 of the Act as including a ‘suspected death’.
2. ‘Reportable death’ is defined in the same section as including a death which occurred in Tasmania and was unexpected or the cause of which is unknown.
3. Thus if a coroner suspects (on reasonable grounds) that a person has died and the death meets the definition of a reportable death, then that coroner has the power to investigate that person’s disappearance.
4. For reasons which will become apparent in this finding I am satisfied that it is appropriate to investigate the disappearance of Peter Henrich because I am satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that he is dead and the cause of his death is unknown.

Mr Henrich's background

5. Mr Henrich was born on 2 March 1960 in Dulmen, Germany to Wilhelm and Theresia Henrich and he had one sister, Jutta. His sister lives in Austria. Mr Henrich moved with his family to Australia in 1986. The family settled in Queensland. Records show he studied economics and computing to tertiary levels. Mr Henrich married in 1990, divorced in 1999 and had no children. Reportedly, he apparently lived in a commune for a number of years but left after a falling out with other members.
6. Mr Henrich worked as a communications engineer in his early adulthood in Germany. Following a diagnosis of schizophrenia in 1993, there is no evidence he worked again and was in receipt of a Disability Support Pension from 1996 until his disappearance.
7. It is apparent that Mr Henrich lived an isolated lifestyle, travelling around Australia in his white Suzuki van, estranged from family and friends.
8. Medical records from Graylands Hospital (a mental health facility) in Western Australia show Mr Henrich was admitted voluntarily in 2010, 2011 and 2012. During these admissions, he described struggling with his mental health, feeling socially isolated, demoralised and impoverished. He suffered insomnia and had a cervical facet joint degeneration that caused frequent headaches and tingling in his extremities.
9. During the years leading up to his death Mr Henrich does not appear to have had a regular doctor or used any prescription medication.
10. The evidence indicates that Mr Henrich has not been seen or heard of by family or friends since 2015. He appears to have arrived in Tasmania in 2016, although when is not clear. Equally, his movements are unclear, although he had recorded encounters with Tasmania Police due to living in his van when parked in public places at Strahan in October 2016, Poatina in March 2017 and Conara in October 2017.

Circumstances of disappearance

11. Police spoke to Mr Henrich when he was at Conara in Tasmania's Midlands on 2 October 2017. He was next verifiably alive when he spoke with staff at JB Hi-Fi and a Sanity music store in the weeks leading up to his disappearance. The conversations related to the ordering of vinyl LPs.
12. Mr Henrich interacted with a local farmer on the Poatina Road on 2 November 2017. It is reasonable to conclude that he was travelling on that occasion from Launceston to the area where his van was subsequently located.
13. Mr Henrich's van was noticed in early November 2017 parked in a large gravel parking area on the western side of Poatina Road, high above Poatina Village by a Hydro employee, Mr Philip Pulford. Mr Pulford's job was to monitor the roads in the general

area and accordingly he drove past the gravel area weekly. He saw the vehicle on 17 December 2017 and again on 2 January 2018, when he returned to work.

14. On that occasion, Mr Pulford checked on the vehicle. He found the van empty with its doors open, many water bottles and camping gear in the back. Mr Pulford made note of the van's registration number and contacted police.

Investigation

15. Police went to the van the following morning, Wednesday, 3 January 2018. The vehicle was unlocked and the rear side window was down. Police searched the van and found its keys in the ashtray. However, no wallet or mobile phone was located. Vehicle registration, license papers, as well as National Australia Bank statements with Mr Henrich's name were located.
16. A packet of meat from a supermarket with an expiry date of 10 November 2017 was in the rear of the van. So was packaged juice with an expiry date of mid-November 2017. Also present in the van were a large number of 2 and 3 litre plastic bottles, some filled with water and others empty. A thin foam mattress, gas bottles and a small gas cooker were also located. A crate containing dozens of brand-new, unopened vinyl LP records was also in the rear of the van, although there was no means of playing them.
17. But there was no sign of Mr Henrich. A foot search of the general area was carried out without success.
18. Tasmania Police immediately broadened the scope of the search. Over the following two days, Virgin, Jetstar and Qantas airlines were all checked for any outgoing departures by Mr Henrich. No sign of him was located. Similar enquiries with the same result were carried out with the TT line. Enquiries with Telstra and Optus indicated that he had no recent mobile telephone connected. Enquiries with the National Australia Bank (who were exceptionally helpful in relation to this enquiry) showed regular use of his bank account up to 2 November 2017. A still image of Mr Henrich was obtained from a NAB ATM at Kings Meadows, a Launceston suburb, showing him withdrawing money on 2 November 2017. On that day, use of his NAB account stopped. It remained in abeyance before beginning again on 31 December 2017. On that date, a number of regular and small purchases under \$70 in the Hobart area at service stations, fast food stores and similar commenced.
19. Mr Henrich's NAB account was used on a total of 34 occasions between 31 December 2017 and 5 January 2018. That evening, police apprehended George Maxwell Chaplin and Caitlin Eileen Cooper¹ who I am satisfied had been using Mr

¹ Ms Cooper and I are not related.

Heindrich's bankcard unlawfully. They were subsequently charged with 34 counts of computer-related fraud, and one count of unlawful possession of property namely Mr Henrich's wallet, drivers licence, centre link healthcare card, centre link statement, vehicle registration papers and NAB bankcard.

20. Chaplin and Cooper told police that they found Mr Henrich's wallet with the bankcard in it. Although accompanying police back to the general area where Mr Heinrich's van was found they could not identify where they claimed they found the wallet. Both denied any knowledge of what had happened to Mr Henrich. Both subsequently failed to answer their bail and did not appear to answer the charges preferred against them. Their current whereabouts is unknown.

Why I am satisfied Mr Henrich is dead

21. Very extensive searching of the area where Mr Henrich's van was located was carried out in January 2018 by Tasmania Police search and rescue personnel and State Emergency Service assisted by a helicopter. No sign of Mr Henrich was found.
22. More searching of the area was carried out in February 2018. On this occasion a New South Wales Police cadaver dog and handler were utilised. There was still no sign of Mr Henrich.
23. I note the area where Mr Henrich's vehicle was found is steep and densely vegetated with many hidden logs, boulders, and deep animal holes. Even very experienced and well equipped searchers found the area difficult to traverse. In my view, the terrain in the general area is such that there is ample opportunity for Mr Henrich to have disappeared and his body not to have been found.
24. Although Mr Henrich's body has not been found, there is sufficient evidence to conclude he is dead. First is the fact that, following his disappearance, Mr Henrich was never seen or heard of again. I acknowledge he was estranged from his family but he was in contact with an acquaintance in Western Australia. That acquaintance has not heard from Mr Heinrich.
25. Second, enquiries with all normal agency such as Centrelink, banking institutions, prisons, hospitals and similar have revealed no evidence that Mr Henrich is alive.

Conclusion

26. In all the circumstances I am satisfied to the requisite legal standard Mr Henrich is dead and has been since on or shortly after 2 November 2017. It seems logical to conclude that he died in a place at or near Poatina, Tasmania. I cannot exclude the possibility that George Maxwell Chaplin and Caitlin Eileen Cooper were involved in Mr Henrich's disappearance, although I acknowledge they denied it to investigators.

Comments and Recommendations

27. As I have said I am satisfied that Mr Henrich died sometime after 2 November 2017 and before 3 January 2018 when his vehicle was found abandoned by police. I am unable to make any further findings. In particular I am unable to reach a concluded view as to the cause or more specific circumstances of his death.
28. The circumstances of Mr Henrich's death are not such as to require me to make any recommendations pursuant to Section 28 of the *Coroners Act 1995*.
29. I convey my sincere condolences to any family and loved ones of Peter Henrich.

Dated 20 September 2022 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

Simon Cooper

Coroner