



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 circumstances surrounding an unidentified femur located at Carlton Beach Tasmania, make the following finding.

Introduction

1. On 14 July 2022, a left femur was located by a member of the public in a rock pool at Carlton Beach, Southern Tasmania. The femur was handed to police at Sorell and the matter duly reported pursuant to the *Coroners Act 1995* (the "Act").

Investigation

2. An investigation under the *Act* was commenced. The femur was examined by the State Forensic Pathologist, who confirmed that it was human. On 18 July 2022, the femur was examined by experienced forensic anthropologist, Dr Anne-Marie Williams. Dr Williams provided a report. In that report she said:

"The bone is very weathered from exposure to the environment over a long period of time. The bone is dry and bleached grey-white, with significant degradation of the bone surface and algal staining on the posterior aspect.

The proximal and distal ends of the bone are missing and the ends of the bone are worn suggesting that the bone has been in a watery environment for a long period of time.

Due to the poor condition of the bone it is difficult to identify, however, it is most likely that the bone is a left femur.

The condition of the remains indicate that this person died at least 10 years ago but it is likely that this person died several decades ago.

Due to the poor condition of the bone it is not possible to determine the sex or ancestry of this person.

It is not possible to determine the age of this person, however, the length and overall size of the bone suggests that they would have been an older adolescent or adult when they died.”

3. At that stage further identification was impossible as was the determination of the cause of death. I note that there was no basis, at all, to have reached any suspicion as to the identity or ancestry of the femur.
4. The femur was securely stored until developments in the National DNA Program for Unidentified and Missing Persons enabled further forensic biological investigations to be carried out. In September 2022, the femur was sent to the National Laboratory for further testing.
5. Meanwhile, DNA testing was undertaken at the laboratory of Forensic Science Service Tasmania against samples relating to persons known to have been missing in the general area of Carlton Beach. Those tests were negative.
6. Testing at the National Laboratory did not identify any 'usable' DNA to aid in the identification of the femur, other than to confirm the femur was that of a male person.
7. However, radiocarbon dating of the bone indicated that it was much older than previously thought, dating from between 772 and 991 A.D. and was therefore Pre-European. The report containing that information was provided to the State Forensic Pathologist who in turn recently reported to the Coronial Division the outcome of those investigations with respect to the age of the femur.
8. The updated investigation file, with all the above information, was received by me on 2 May 2024.

Conclusion

9. Having formed the view (that is to say reasonably suspecting having regard to the new evidence) that the remains are aboriginal, I **refer** the matter to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, the relevant aboriginal organisation approved by the Attorney General, pursuant to section 23 of the Act.

Dated: 3 May 2024 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.



Simon Cooper

Coroner