



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11

I, Madeleine Wilson, Coroner, having investigated the death of Jason Bradley de Plater

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Jason Bradley de Plater, whose date of birth is 3 October 1970.
- b) Mr de Plater, 54, was born in Parramatta, New South Wales to Keith and Elaine de Plater. He was the youngest of four boys. He completed his schooling at the end of year 10 and commenced an apprenticeship as a mechanical fitter. After qualifying, Mr de Plater worked as a mechanical fitter in New South Wales and Queensland and completed numerous other qualifications throughout his career. Mr de Plater met his future wife in 2004, and they married later that year on his birthday. Mr de Plater and his family moved to Queensland in 2007. His children, Ferdinand and Madelaine were born in 2005 and 2010.

Mr de Plater travelled to Tasmania to walk the Western Arthur Traverse Range, commencing at Scotts Peak in December 2024. On 26 December 2024, he sent a text message to family indicating that he had commenced the walk but had changed his plans due to forecast bad weather. Mr de Plater indicated that he intended to “descend the mountain” to join the Port Davey track and walk to Melaleuca. He indicated that he had booked a plane back to Hobart, departing on 31 December 2024.

On 26 December 2024, David Webby set out to walk the circuit of Western Arthurs Ranges in the Southwest. On 27 December 2024, Mr Webby was walking to Lake Cygnus. Between approximately 11:00 and 12:00pm he passed a male, who I find to be Mr de Plater, on the track. Mr de Plater appeared to be coming down the track from the direction of Lake Cygnus. Mr Webby said hello to Mr de Plater and he responded by asking where

the track was. Mr de Plater appeared disoriented at the time. The weather conditions were “very bad”, it was hailing and very windy. Mr de Plater was observed to be wearing wet weather gear. Mr Webby camped overnight at Lake Cygnus and set off early on the morning of 28 December 2024 to walk back out due to the weather conditions. After walking for about two and a half hours, Mr Webby was halfway down Alpha Moraine near a rock ledge when he observed a wet sleeping bag and a pair of underpants on the track. Nearby were a pair of good quality walking boots and two pairs of socks which appeared to have been discarded.

A short distance further along the track was the body of Mr de Plater. He was lying face down on the track and his face was in a small puddle of water. His hands and bare feet appeared white, and he was in rigor mortis.

A short distance from Mr de Plater’s body, Mr Webby discovered what appeared to be his campsite. It appeared that Mr de Plater had been sleeping on an air mattress, beside it was a tarpaulin and rope. There were no signs of a tent or swag. A phone was lying on the mattress, and a hiking pack was located at the end of the mattress.¹

Mr Webby set off his Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) at 11:15am on 28 December 2024 and a rescue helicopter was dispatched to the Western Arthur Range. Tasmania Police officers attended the scene and retrieved the body of Mr de Plater.

Mr de Plater was found with a Garmin Inreach navigation/communication device. Attending officers activated the emergency function to identify the registered owner, however they received no result. Subsequent enquiries revealed that the account belonged to a Victorian man who had sold the device to Mr de Plater on eBay on 4 November 2024. The account for the Garmin subscription service had not been paid since Mr de Plater came into possession of the device and there was no record of SOS activations for the device. Of note, the Garmin SOS function will not operate without an active satellite subscription.

Forensic Pathologist Dr Donald Ritchey conducted a postmortem examination and confirmed that the cause of death was hypothermia. Dr Ritchey observed that Mr de Plater had superficial injuries of the legs and

¹ A tent was later located inside Mr de Plater’s backpack.

hands but there was no evidence of fatal trauma. The absence of trauma was confirmed on postmortem CT scans. No anatomical cause of death was identified.

Toxicology testing detected the presence of nicotine and THC, the major psychoactive constituent of cannabis, in a sample of Mr de Plater's blood, indicating possible recent use of cannabis. Located inside Mr de Plater's backpack was a snap lock bag containing 4.42g cannabis and a smoking device.

Mr Paul Helleman, a retired Parks and Wildlife Services ranger with 40 years' experience, examined the list of items recovered from Mr de Plater's backpack. He stated that it appeared that the items were adequate for the trip, but he was unable to comment on the quality of the clothing. He noted that Mr de Plater had an Akubra style hat, rather than a wool or polar fleece beanie, which was not appropriate for the conditions, and referred to a similar case² in which a 55-year-old male from Queensland died of hypothermia on the Overland Track in 2016. Mr Helleman noted that the choice of headwear was indicative in both cases of a failure to appreciate the weather conditions that were likely to be encountered.

Evidence received in the investigation revealed that Mr de Plater had previously undertaken the Federation Peak Walk in his 30's but otherwise had limited experience walking in Tasmania's alpine conditions. He had been training for his solo bushwalking trip to Tasmania and was described by his wife as "very fit".

I am satisfied that Mr de Plater had sufficient knowledge and experience of walking in Tasmania to undertake the multiday hike at Western Arthur Range. While his choice of headwear may suggest that he did not fully appreciate the extent of the changeable weather conditions likely to be encountered during summer, I am nevertheless satisfied that Mr de Plater recognised his limitations in the face of those conditions and made the appropriate decision to turn back. I am unable to ascertain how far Mr de Plater had walked before deciding to turn back, but I find he had commenced the return journey at the time of his death.

² Inquest into the death of Trevor John Tolputt dated 21 May 2019.

- c) Mr de Plater's cause of death was hypothermia (environmental cold exposure).
- d) Mr de Plater died between 27 and 28 December 2024 at Western Arthur Range Traverse, Tasmania.

In making the above findings, I have had regard to the evidence gained in the investigation into Mr de Plater's death which includes:

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavit of Constable Theresa Paterson, regarding identification, dated 30 December 2024;
- Affidavit of Sumalee de Plater dated 15 February 2025;
- Affidavit of David John Webby dated 28 December 2024;
- Statement of Paul Helleman;
- Marine and Rescue Incident Report;
- Report of Dr Anthony Bell, MD FRACP FCICM, Coronial Medical Consultant;
- Affidavit of Forensic Scientist Neil McLachlan-Troup dated 24 February 2025; and
- Report of Forensic Pathologist Dr Donald Ritchey, regarding cause of death, dated 25 February 2025.

Comments

Western Arthur Range Traverse

The Western Arthur Range is located in Southwest National Park, in part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The Western Arthur Range Traverse is a five to seven day, 58 kilometre loop walk and is considered to be one of the most challenging multi-day walks in Tasmania covering extensive, rugged topography and narrow corridors throughout much of the range. Alternative routes include walking to Lake Cygnus or Lake Oberon and back, being a three to four day hike. The Traverse is rated as a grade five route and it is recommended it be undertaken by very experienced bushwalkers with significant experience in remote, alpine conditions and

specialised skills, including navigation and emergency first aid. The Parks and Wildlife Service warns that tracks are likely to be very rough, very steep and unmarked. The walk is for physically capable and highly experienced walkers who are confident with navigation, cliffs and rock scrambling, pack hauling and extreme weather. Walkers must register with Parks and Wildlife Service before commencing the walk and numbers are limited to twelve (12) persons departing each day.

The Parks and Wildlife Service website provides useful information for prospective walkers including suggested "Walker Pack Lists" and recommends walkers purchase and carry a physical copy of the Western Arthur map. Walk notes and safe walking guidelines are also published on the website, including taking a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) and avoiding walking alone.

PLBs are available for hire from Service Tasmania shops and when activated, provide the GPS location to rescue services during life-threatening emergencies and are able to be activated in remote areas, where other methods may fail.

It is advisable that each individual or group should carry a PLB when undertaking the Western Arthur Range Traverse.

There was evidence that Mr de Plater had purchased a Garmin Inreach Explorer Plus, a global SOS satellite communicator but that he did not have an active subscription, rendering the device inoperative. Care should be taken when purchasing second hand emergency devices to ensure that individuals are aware of the device's operational requirements, including (in appropriate cases) the requirement to obtain current, active subscriptions and to ensure that the device is in working order and fit for purpose.

The Parks and Wildlife website also contains detailed safety messages, pack guides and a hypothermia safety video. These are a useful resource for persons undertaking the Western Arthur Range Traverse and prospective walkers are encouraged to inform themselves of the material available on the Parks and Wildlife website.

There was evidence that Mr de Plater had recently used cannabis. THC³ has its greatest effect on the central nervous system and cardiovascular systems. It causes cognitive, perceptual and behavioural changes (for example, impaired co-ordination, reaction times and judgment). Higher doses may result in confusion, restlessness, excitement, hallucinations, anxiety or panic, detachment from reality and increased reaction time.⁴ In circumstances where environmental stress is possible, the ability to

³ Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the major psychoactive constituent of cannabis.

⁴ Affidavit of Neil McLachlan-Troup sworn on 24 February 2025.

plan and make appropriate decisions is damaged, making the user more prone to hypothermia.⁵ The ingestion of cannabis when engaging in outdoor pursuits in the wilderness is likely to lead to some level of cognitive impairment which may result in poor decision making, which could expose an individual to greater risk of injury or even death.

The Tasmanian wilderness can be a place of stunning natural beauty but its topography and weather conditions can at times be unforgiving. Individuals embarking on multi-day walks should ensure they are properly appraised of the risks involved, ensure that they are physically fit and have experience that is relevant to the particular challenges of the hike and do not undertake activities beyond their capabilities. Weather conditions can change dramatically and care should be taken to ensure that the correct equipment is taken and that appropriate communication for the area is carried and capable of being activated in case of an emergency. Walkers should avoid walking alone and ensure someone is aware of their plans. Walkers should also educate themselves on the signs of hypothermia.

The circumstances surrounding Mr de Plater's death are not such that require me to make any recommendations pursuant to section 28 of the *Coroners Act 1995*.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr de Plater.

Dated: 19 June 2026 at Hobart, in the State of Tasmania.

Madeleine Wilson
Coroner

⁵ Report of Dr Anthony Bell dated 4 May 2026.