



IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

COR 2024 006757

FINDING INTO DEATH WITHOUT INQUEST

Form 38 Rule 63(2)

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Findings of:	Coroner David Ryan
Deceased:	Darryn Leslie Beaton
Date of birth:	7 June 1962
Date of death:	Unknown
Cause of death:	Unascertained
Place of death:	Unknown
Keywords:	Missing person – suspected death

INTRODUCTION

1. On 28 November 1984, Darryn Leslie Beaton was 22 years old when he went missing. At the time of his disappearance, Darryn lived in Hamilton with his family. He is survived by his father, Raymond Beaton, and his brothers, Christopher and Andrew Beaton.

BACKGROUND

2. Darryn's medical history included schizophrenia for which he had been prescribed medication. He had an admission to the Brierly Mental Hospital in Warrnambool about two years before his disappearance. He also had a history of cannabis use.
3. Andrew recalled that Darryn stopped taking his medication about six months before his disappearance, after which he "*became distracted and had voices in his head*".

THE CORONIAL INVESTIGATION

4. On 20 November 2024, Darryn's death was reported to the coroner as it fell within the definition of a reportable death in the *Coroners Act 2008 (the Act)*. Reportable deaths include deaths that are unexpected, unnatural or violent or result from accident or injury. Under section 3 of the Act, death includes suspected death.
5. The role of a coroner is to independently investigate reportable deaths to establish, if possible, identity, medical cause of death, and surrounding circumstances. Surrounding circumstances are limited to events which are sufficiently proximate and causally related to the death. The purpose of a coronial investigation is to establish the facts, not to cast blame or determine criminal or civil liability.
6. Under the Act, coroners also have the important functions of helping to prevent deaths and promoting public health and safety and the administration of justice through the making of comments or recommendations in appropriate cases about any matter connected to the death under investigation.
7. Victoria Police assigned an officer to be the Coronial Investigator for the investigation of Darryn's death. The Coronial Investigator has conducted inquiries on my behalf, including taking statements from witnesses – such as family, the forensic pathologist, treating clinicians and investigating officers – and submitted a coronial brief of evidence.

8. This finding draws on the totality of the coronial investigation into Darryn's death. While I have reviewed all the material, I will only refer to that which is directly relevant to my findings or necessary for narrative clarity. In the coronial jurisdiction, facts must be established on the balance of probabilities.¹
9. The coronial investigation of a suspected death differs significantly from most other coronial investigations which commence with the discovery of a deceased person's body or remains. The focus in those cases is on identification of the body or remains, a forensic pathologist's examination and advice to the coroner about the medical cause of death and, where possible, the circumstances in which the death occurred.
10. Absent a body or remains, the coronial investigation focuses on the last sighting of the person suspected to be deceased; any subsequent contact with family, friends or authorities; and any evidence of proof of life since the last sighting. In such cases, the coronial investigation must first endeavour to establish, on the balance of probabilities, whether the person suspected to be deceased – is deceased. Such proof of death often relies on the absence of evidence that the person is alive, such as physical searches for the person; a lack of contact with known friends, family or colleagues; a lack of banking or like activities; and the lack of an "*electronic footprint*" that is usually evident with innumerable modern everyday activities. It also relies on other circumstantial evidence such as the prevailing environmental conditions and the individual attributes of the person suspected to be deceased, including their state of health.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF DISAPPEARANCE

11. On 28 November 1984 at around 2.30pm, Darryn left home in his vehicle, a white Leyland Mini. He and his parents had been planning a holiday and he told them that he was going to the ANZ bank in Hamilton to withdraw some money. There is no evidence that Darryn has been seen since this time. Andre recalled that Darryn had "*a couple of thousand dollars in the bank which hadn't been touched*".
12. On 30 November 1984, Raymond reported Darryn missing to Victoria Police. The Missing Person Report recorded that Darryn had ceased his medication in July 1984 and that he was "*possibly depressed, vague*" with a "*temporary loss of memory*".

¹ Subject to the principles enunciated in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336. The effect of this and similar authorities is that coroners should not make adverse findings against, or comments about, individuals unless the evidence provides a comfortable level of satisfaction as to those matters taking into account the consequences of such findings or comments.

POLICE INVESTIGATION

13. Victoria Police in Hamilton commenced a search for Darryn and on 2 December 1984, they located his vehicle in the Grampians National Park at the intersection of Victoria Range Road and Sawmill Track. The search then continued with the assistance of the Search and Rescue Squad, the Mounted Branch and the State Emergency Service, including the use of trail bikes and four-wheel drive vehicles. A Command Centre was established at “Strachan’s Hut”. No sign of Darryn was found and the search was called off on 6 December 1984 at 9.00pm.
14. On 22 December 1985, an article was published in a local newspaper seeking information about Darryn’s disappearance. There is no evidence that any useful or relevant information was provided in response to the publication of the article.
15. Carriage of the police investigation remained with local police and the Missing Persons Unit until 2004, when it was reviewed by Operation Bellier. Operation Bellier was a task force created to review long term missing persons investigations. They made updated inquiries and examined unidentified human remains reports, including from four cases of remains found in Halls Gap. These inquiries were not fruitful.
16. In February 2008, Operation Bellier operatives visited the site where Darryn’s vehicle was located with his parents. DNA samples were provided by them. The DNA profile has since been lodged with the Victorian and National Missing Persons Databases for comparison with future cases. To date, no comparable DNA matches have been identified.
17. In 2017, the Hamilton Crime Investigation Unit took over carriage of the investigation and periodical reviews were conducted. Despite extensive searches, police have been unable to obtain relevant historical records relating to Darryn’s medical history, including in relation to his admission to Brierly Mental Hospital. Further, on 5 December 2024, Raymond was interviewed by police in relation to Darryn’s disappearance.
18. Victoria Police did not identify any evidence of suspicious circumstances relating to Darryn’s death.
19. There is no evidence that Darryn has been seen alive since his disappearance and no other evidence to suggest that he is still alive. There has been no trace of him since his abandoned vehicle was located December 1984.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

20. I am satisfied that Darryn is deceased. Further, I am satisfied that there are no further avenues of investigation reasonably open at this stage to elicit further evidence about the cause and circumstances of his death.
21. The evidence does not enable me to be satisfied as to the exact circumstances or cause of Darryn's death. I am satisfied that he left his vehicle in dense bushland in the Grampians National Park around 28 November 1984. It is likely that he was suffering from mental ill health at the time as a result of him not taking his medication which had been prescribed for his diagnosed schizophrenia. It is possible that he became lost or injured and passed away from exposure to the elements or that he took his own life.
22. Pursuant to section 67(1) of the Act, I make the following findings:
 - a) the identity of the deceased was Darryn Leslie Beaton, born 7 June 1962;
 - b) the death occurred between on an unknown date; and
 - c) the death occurred in the circumstances described above.
23. It is acknowledged that the fact that Darryn has not been found was very distressing for his family and they have not had an opportunity to have greater clarity in relation to the exact circumstances of his passing.

I convey my sincere condolences to Darryn's family for their loss.

Pursuant to section 73(1B) of the Act, I order that this finding be published on the Coroners Court of Victoria website in accordance with the rules.

I direct that a copy of this finding be provided to the following:

Andrew Beaton

Detective Senior Constable Craig Wastell, Coronial Investigator

Signature:



Coroner David Ryan

Date: 05 March 2026

NOTE: Under section 83 of the *Coroners Act 2008* ('the Act'), a person with sufficient interest in an investigation may appeal to the Trial Division of the Supreme Court against the findings of a coroner in respect of a death after an investigation. An appeal must be made within 6 months after the day on which the determination is made, unless the Supreme Court grants leave to appeal out of time under section 86 of the Act.
