

Horse corpse, 1895



Description

This is a black-and-white photograph of the dried-up corpse of a horse. The original was taken by Archibald Sanderson during his bicycle ride to Coolgardie, Western Australia, in 1895 and is captioned 'No Water' (written under the photograph in Sanderson's album and not seen here). The land in the foreground has been cleared while native bush is seen behind. A telegraph pole can also be seen in the background. The photograph measures 8 cm x 10 cm.

Educational value

- This asset suggests the harsh conditions experienced on the Western Australian gold fields - horses died of thirst and hunger because of a lack of fresh water and suitable natural fodder; in particularly dry periods, teamsters or prospectors might abandon their riding or pack horses because of the high cost of feeding and watering them.
- It suggests that horses were used in the gold fields - hundreds of horses were used locally around Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie for transport of goods and people; one source states that carriers' teams totalling about 500 horses, as well as camel trains of up to 200, were on the road to Coolgardie every day; by 1901, there was one horse for every two people in Australia; a horse could do a journey in a fifth of the time it would take someone on foot.
- It implies, by the caption 'No Water', that a horse in dry places may have limited use - horses were not partial to the native vegetation whereas camels thrived on it; it was estimated that before the railway was extended further east, four-fifths of the loads carried by horse teams leaving Northam consisted of food and water for their journey to the gold fields and back.
- It might have been taken at the site of a telegraph office - Woolgangie Rock is a massive granite outcrop and tanks (dams) were constructed at its base to catch runoff from rain for horses and people; in 1896, the Woolgangie telegraph office



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dispatched 5,260 telegrams, including telegrams to Western Australia's Premier John Forrest and Engineer-in-Chief C Y O'Connor appealing to them to send water because of a particularly serious shortage in the area.

- It suggests the critical place of water supplies on the gold fields - prospectors risked their lives and those of their animals searching for gold in the waterless tracks, with many dying in agony from dehydration; it was not until ten years after the Coolgardie gold fields were discovered that a 560-km pipeline was built to ensure a plentiful and reliable supply of fresh water.

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Creator Archibald Sanderson, photographer, 1895

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