

Media article - The Wentworth Courier 12/12/2001

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Did he fall or was he pushed?

By KIM O'CONNOR

VICTIMS of assaults and gay bashings in the Marks Park area between Bondi and Tamarama are being asked to contact police, who have recently reopened two 12-year-old cases: one a suspicious death, the other a disappearance.

Rose Bay police have launched Operation Taradale in an attempt to solve the mystery surrounding what they described as the "suspicious death" of 31-year-old John Russell, whose body was found on November 24, 1989 on a rock shelf at the base of the cliff, and the disappearance of Wollongong TV news reader Ross Warren some four months earlier.

Last Sunday morning police used a dummy dressed in a red cotton sweatshirt and navy blue jeans, like those Mr Russell had been wearing, to re-enact the scene.

Crowds of people doing the popular cliff walk between the beaches watched as a police rescue officer repeatedly pushed the weighted dummy over the sandstone edge from a number of angles.

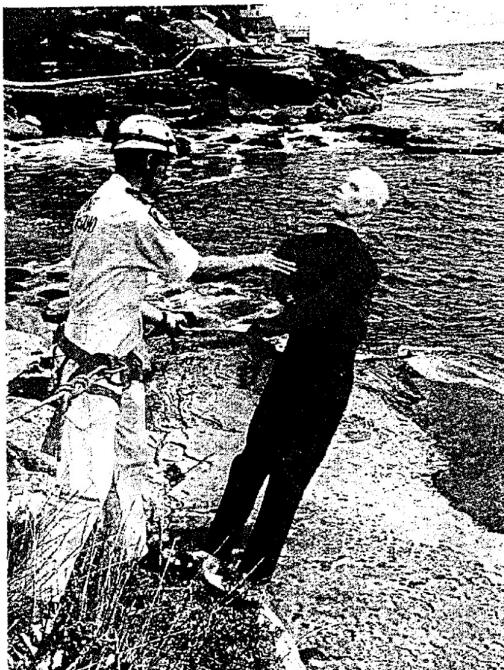
On the rocks below, crime-scene investigators took measurements and photographs of the 11-metre fall and landing positions.

Detective Inspector Terry Dalton, crime manager for the Rose Bay local area command, said: "Changes to technology in the last 10 years (such as DNA testing) and advances in intelligence work will, we believe, help us to collect vital information in these cases."

"Hairs found in the hand of Mr Russell are currently undergoing DNA testing which may help us identify an offender."

"Using the dummy in this re-creation will assist investigators in determining whether Mr Russell fell from the cliff or was pushed."

Police had earlier ruled out suicide as friends reported that Mr Russell, who had



Senior Constable Tony Geddes of the Police Rescue and Bomb Unit pushes a dummy off a Tamarama cliff.

been last seen at a Bondi hotel the night before, was looking forward to a secure future following news that he was the beneficiary of a large inheritance.

Det Insp Dalton added that both Mr Russell and Mr Warren were members of the gay community and could well have been targeted during 1989 when gay people frequented Marks Park.

In the case of Ross Warren's disappearance, police said the 25-year-old was last seen by friends on July 22, 1989. His car was later located near Marks Park and his set of keys was found on a rock shelf below the reserve.

His body has never been recovered.

Sue Thompson, a NSW police gay/lesbian client group consultant, said investigators had received information that the men may have been singled out by their at-

tackers because they were members of the gay community.

"There were a number of gay hate crimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Marks Park was a meeting place for men to pick up men at that time," she said.

Superintendent Paul Chapman said Operation Taradale had been running for five months and police were a fair way down the track in the investigation.

"When anyone has gone missing or there is suspicion surrounding the death of a family member, it is a concern for all the families involved."

"I would urge any members of the community who may have been assaulted and not reported it to the police to make contact through Crime Stoppers (1800 333 000) or through Paddington police station."