
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996
CORONER : SARAH HELEN LINTON, ACTING STATE CORONER
HEARD : 17 MARCH 2026
DELIVERED : 7 JULY 2026
FILE NO/S : CORC 1352 of 2025
DECEASED : YOUNG, MESSIAH AUGUSTIN

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Nil

Counsel Appearing:

Senior Constable C Robertson assisted the Coroner.

Case(s) referred to in decision(s):

Nil

Coroners Act 1996
(Section 26(1))

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

*I, Sarah Helen Linton, Acting State Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **Messiah Augustin YOUNG** with an inquest held at the **Perth Coroner’s Court, Court 85, CLC Building, 501 Hay Street, Perth** on 17 March 2026, find that the death of **Messiah Augustin YOUNG** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Messiah Augustin YOUNG** and that death occurred on an unknown date between **12 February 2021 and 15 February 2021** in bushland near Giles-Mulga Park Road, Ngaanyatjarra-Giles, from an unknown cause in the following circumstances:*

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INTRODUCTION

1. Mr Young was a 20 year old Aboriginal man who lived in the Tjukurla Aboriginal Community on the vast Ngaanyatjarra Lands, north-east of Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. Tjukurla is located close to the Northern Territory border, so there is considerable movement of people in the community across the state/territory border. Mr Young was known to spend time in towns on either side of the border.
2. Mr Young was last known to be staying in the Docker River Aboriginal Community in the Northern Territory before he went missing. He left Docker River with two male relatives, whom I will refer to as BG and RL, on the morning of 8 February 2021 with a plan to drive across the border to the Irrunytju (Wingellina) Aboriginal Community in Western Australia, where they allegedly planned to buy cannabis. The men took a back road to get there, but their car broke down on the way. Stuck in isolated bushland, the three men decided to try to walk to a main road in the hope of flagging down a passing vehicle. They walked for a number of days before RL became separated from Mr Young and his other relative. After walking a bit further on his own, RL found his way to a road and was rescued by a passing vehicle. He made his way back to Docker River, but the other two men had not returned.
3. Police became aware on 14 February 2021 that Mr Young and the other man, BG, were still missing. A comprehensive land search and rescue operation was commenced and on 15 February 2021, BG's body was located in bushland approximately three kilometres from a campsite that the men had used. The search continued for Mr Young but no further sign of him was found. The search was eventually stood down on the understanding it was most likely Mr Young had died in a similar manner to BG, but unfortunately his body could not be located.
4. On the basis of the information provided by the WA Police in relation to Mr Young's disappearance, I determined that pursuant to s 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA), there was reasonable cause to suspect that Mr Young had died and his death was a reportable death. I therefore made a direction that a coroner hold an inquest into the circumstances of the suspected death.¹
5. I held an inquest at the Perth Coroner's Court on 17 March 2026. Unfortunately, it was not logistically feasible to hold the inquest closer to where Mr Young usually lived and/or where he disappeared, but videolinks were arranged to two remote locations to allow as many family and friends as possible to follow the inquest proceedings electronically. The inquest consisted of the tendering of documentary evidence compiled during the police investigation conducted into Mr Young's disappearance, as well as hearing evidence from Senior Sergeant Adam Griffiths, who compiled the investigation report into Mr Young's disappearance when he was stationed at Kalgoorlie Detective's Office. I also delayed the delivery of my findings, to allow family members to provide any further information they wished to bring to my attention, given they were unable to attend in person.²

¹ Section 23 *Coroners Act* Direction of Deputy State Coroner.

² T 20.

BACKGROUND

6. Mr Young was born and raised on Ngurrara lands and he had ties to the Kiwirrkurra community and the Tjukurla community. He was named Messiah Tjakamar West by his mother, Donna Larry, although his birth was not formally registered in the Northern Territory. He was known by some as Messiah West and by others as Junior Young, but the name most people knew him by was Messiah Young. He had taken on the name Young after his mother gave him over to her friend, Donna Young, to raise him when he was about four years of age. Mr Young also went by the nickname Spider. He was raised by Ms Young together with her four other children within his biological mother's home community of Tjukurla in the Ngaanyatjarra-Giles region. He attended the Tjukurla Community School until he completed Year 9, then ceased his schooling.³
7. Mr Young was single and did not have any children. He was close with both his foster mother and biological mother as an adult. According to Ms Larry and Ms Young, he did not open any bank accounts and he did not obtain a driver's licence. Mr Young did not drink alcohol but he did smoke cannabis. His only known medical condition was diabetes. He was prescribed medication for his diabetes, but he apparently rarely took his tablets.⁴
8. Mr Young was described as a happy person who loved spending time with family and friends, telling his stories. He was a good footballer and hunter and he often went out looking for bush tucker.⁵

LAST KNOWN EVENTS

9. As noted above, the evidence indicates Mr Young was staying in the Northern Territory shortly before he disappeared. He was staying in the Docker River Community with relatives. Mr Young is known to have left Docker River on Monday, 8 February 2021 in the company of his cousins, BG and RL. The trio were travelling in a white 2003 model Toyota Prado owned by another relative. RL was driving and he told police they were intending to drive across the border to Wingellina (Irrunytju) Community in Western Australia to purchase some cannabis.⁶
10. The group reportedly decided to travel on a rarely used unsealed track known as the tri-state border track or 'The Shortcut Road' to travel to Wingellina, in order to avoid police attention. The men took with them some jerry cans with extra fuel and some money, but they were not equipped with food or water as they were not expecting it to be a long journey and planned to be at their destination by nightfall. They hadn't planned for an emergency situation.⁷
11. The Toyota Prado suffered mechanical failure to the point it was undrivable on the way to Wingellina. RL was driving and he recalled it stalled going up a sand dune. The men thought it was an issue with the battery and tried to push start the car, but

³ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.2.

⁴ T 11; Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.2.

⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.3.

⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.1 and Tab 5.

⁷ T 14 – 15; Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.3 and Tab 3.

they had no luck. The three men were stranded in remote bushland in the Ngaanyatjarra-Giles lands near Warakurna, Western Australia. The area is very remote and the terrain is rugged, so there was little hope of finding much food or water even though Mr Young had experience finding bush tucker. As they had been travelling on a back road, they were not hopeful that another car would come by soon. Accordingly, they decided not to remain with the vehicle, which is usually the safest option, but instead set out on foot together. They were aiming to walk to the Wingellina Road, where they hoped to find help from passing travellers.⁸

12. The three men spent several days walking towards the road. They walked during the day and rested at night in the rough terrain. As they walked, they found and drank small amounts of dirty water they found in holes, some of which was possibly contaminated camel urine.⁹
13. On Thursday, 11 February 2021, the three men camped near a large rock at dusk as rain started to fall. Heavy rain fell throughout the night. RL had been unwell with gut pain overnight, which he attributed to drinking the dirty water. When he woke on the morning of Friday, 12 February 2021, he found Mr Young and BG had gone. He called out to them, but did not get a response. RL told police he did not know why they had left him, as they had not been arguing, but he did note they were all struggling due to lack of food and water and battling heat exhaustion. RL looked for any signs of the direction they had headed, but the rain had washed away any tracks, so RL set off on his own and continued to walk in the direction he thought would take him to the road. He did not hear or see any sign of the other men as he walked.¹⁰
14. RL eventually found his way to the Wingellina road (the Giles-Mulga Park Road). He was so exhausted by then that he simply lay down on the road. That is where he was lying when he was seen by a passing motorist, Clive Shaw. Mr Shaw stopped and picked up RL and then continued to drive towards Great Central Road. Unfortunately, Mr Shaw's vehicle ran out of fuel, so once again they were stranded. The two men camped in the vehicle overnight on the side of Great Central Road and in the morning, they started to walk along the road, hoping to get a lift from a passing car.¹¹
15. On the morning of Saturday, 13 February 2021, the two men were walking when they became separated. RL was walking on the road towards Warakurna on his own when he was picked up by another passing vehicle. The car contained some community members who were going to a roadhouse to purchase supplies. They recalled RL looked weak and was thirsty, so they gave him food and water they had with them. The car continued on and they also came across Mr Shaw. The group then continued on to Warakurna Roadhouse, where they spent a few hours obtaining supplies. Mr Shaw left with someone else and the other community members drove RL back to Docker River.¹²

⁸ T 7 – 8; Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.1 – 3 and Tab 5.

⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 5.

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.1 and Tab 5.

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.1.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 5 and Tab 9.

DISCOVERY THAT MR YOUNG WAS MISSING

16. Before leaving Docker River, RL had told his wife he intended to be gone for a maximum of two days, so she was expecting he would return home by 10 February 2021. When he had not returned by that day, she tried to raise her concerns with other community members, but they reassured her and no-one seemed sufficiently concerned to consider it necessary to advise the police at that time. After RL was rescued, one of the people in the car rang RL's wife from the Warakurna Roadhouse and told her he had been found.¹³
17. On the way back to Docker River, RL mentioned to the others that he was concerned about Mr Young and BG as their car had broken down and he didn't know where they were. Once they returned to the Docker River community, word passed around that some people had gone missing.¹⁴ The information eventually made its way to the local police. A community member, Simon Butler, contacted Brevet Sergeant Luke Motson (BS Motson) of Blackstone Multi-Functional Police Facility on the afternoon of Saturday, 13 February 2021, and advised three boys went driving on the back track to Wingellina and had not returned.¹⁵
18. BS Motson rang Brevet Senior Sergeant Revis Ryder (BSS Ryder), the Officer in Charge of the Warakurna Multi-Functional Police Facility, and told him he was trying to locate three missing men, but it was unclear which side of the border they were on. BS Motson asked BSS Ryder if Simon Butler was at Warakurna, as he wanted to ask him for more information. However, Mr Butler wasn't at Warakurna. BS Motson then made further inquiries and established the identities of the three men and that RL had returned but BG and Mr Young were still missing. However, the police were then told that someone was heading out to collect the other two men, so no further action was taken by police at that time.¹⁶
19. On Sunday, 14 February 2021, some friends drove RL to the abandoned Toyota Prado. They managed to get it started again by replacing the battery. They then drove around and conducted a search of the nearby area for Mr Young and BG, without success. After they were unable to locate Mr Young and BG, the men returned to Docker River. In the meantime, Mr Young's family had become very concerned about him, so Mr Young's uncle went to the Police Facility and advised BSS Ryder that his nephew and two other boys (apparently not knowing RL had returned) were missing and family were worried.¹⁷

THE INITIAL SEARCH AND DISCOVERY OF BG

20. BSS Ryder Spoke to BS Motson again on the morning of Sunday, 14 February 2021. They were unclear if it would be a WA Police or NT Police job initially, given the border issue. BSS Ryder conducted some further inquiries into the missing men and received more information from community members, which confirmed a number of

¹³ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, pp.3 – 4 and Tab 5.

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.4, Tab 5 and Tab 9.

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.4.

¹⁶ T 6; Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.4 and Tab 10.

¹⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.4, Tab 5 and Tab 8.

men were missing. Police incident reports were created and a Land Search and Rescue operation (the search) was commenced.

21. One option to locate them would be by triangulating a position from the men's mobile phones. In this case, two of the men did not have mobile phones and the other man's phone showed no data for the previous weeks. In any event, mobile phone reception is known to be very poor in the area due to the remoteness, so triangulating their position was not possible.¹⁸
22. The search was led by BSS Ryder, with the first step involving driving out to the area in an attempt to find the last known position for the missing men. BSS Ryder's vehicle became bogged whilst travelling in the harsh terrain. I am informed the conditions are often muddy when it rains out there, which can often lead to vehicles getting bogged. Given the distances involved, the vehicle was not able to be retrieved until nightfall. At that time, a decision was made to return the following day, during daylight hours, and to continue the search with the aid of local trackers and community members.¹⁹
23. A full search commenced on Monday, 15 February 2021. The search utilised assets including an AMSA jet, aircraft and drones from Police Air Wing, Police Tactical Response Group (TRG) Trackers, the Warakurna Ranger Trackers and ground units.²⁰
24. BSS Ryder was informed that RL might be in Warakurna and could provide some information. Police officers began to try to locate him. At around midday, Northern Territory police located RL travelling in a vehicle on the Great Central Road towards Warakurna. RL told police he was out there because he was looking for the two missing men. He was asked to help in the police search. He agreed and voluntarily accompanied police officers from Warakurna to try and identify the locations the three men had visited before they got separated.²¹
25. At approximately 5.00 pm that same day, with the assistance of RL and Aboriginal Ranger Trackers from Warakurna, the police located the area where the trio's vehicle had first broken down. They continued on from that spot and found the location where the three men had last camped together on the night of Thursday, 11 February 2021, before they became separated. This was about 4.3 km from where the car broke down.²²
26. Continuing on from that location, some of the searchers located a body at about 7.00 pm. The identity of the person was initially believed to be Mr Young. However, his identity was later confirmed by fingerprint analysis as BG. BG's body was located in remote bushland. It appeared he had likely been deceased for some time, given the level of decomposition. A post mortem examination was later conducted. The forensic pathologist found no evidence of injuries or features of natural disease that would have caused the death (separate to evidence of possible animal interference post death). Noting the circumstances in which BG was found, and

¹⁸ T 8.

¹⁹ T 8; Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p. 4, Tab 7 and Tab 10.

²⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p. 5, Tab 3 and Tab 10.

²¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p. 5, Tab 3 and Tab 5.

²² Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p. 5, Tab 3 and Tab 5.

taking into account information that the daily maximum temperature around the time the men first went missing was between 31.8 and 38.4 degrees Celsius, the forensic pathologist concluded that it appeared BG had died as a result of exposure in harsh environmental conditions.²³

27. A coroner found BG died on an unknown date between 12 and 15 February 2021 from exposure, after walking in bushland for several days without food or water. The coroner found BG's death occurred by way of accident.²⁴

THE CONTINUING SEARCH FOR MR YOUNG

28. After BG's body was located, the search for Mr Young continued. A single set of footprints were found leading away from BG's body, which were believed to belong to Mr Young. The footprints were heading west and were tracked by TRG trackers for several kilometres, but they were unable to find any further sign of Mr Young.²⁵ The search continued in a broader search area from that point, beginning one kilometre from where BG was located.²⁶

29. Three locations had been noted as significant:

- the Primary Scene (the last campsite used by the three men);
- the Secondary Scene 1 (the site where the Toyota Prado had been abandoned assuming Mr Young may have returned to it); and
- the Secondary Scene 2 (the location where BG's body was found).

A singlet was found at Secondary Scene 1 (the Prado site), which was believed to have belonged to Mr Young.²⁷

30. A ground search of 300 metres radius was conducted from each of these three locations. It was noted that the ground crews were subjected to extreme heat and navigating harsh terrain, which accelerated fatigue and made the ground search particularly challenging. To help cover more area, an air search was conducted around these locations to three nautical miles radius, assisted by drones, local aviation services, trackers and even a local camel mustering contractor. No further sign of Mr Young was found and no additional information was obtained that added to the discovery of BG's body and the footprints leading away from that site.²⁸
31. A survival expert, Dr Luckin, was consulted but he could not assist with any suggested alteration to the intended search area. Dr Luckin's opinion was also sought on a time frame for survival. Dr Luckin advised on a best case scenario, if Mr Young had been able to collect and drink a large quantity of water on Friday, 12 February 2021, during and following the heavy rain, and had continued to find a collection of water, he could have remained alive, and it was suggested he would likely be found near a water source. If the searchers could not see any possibility of

²³ Exhibit 1; Tab 2, Tab 3 and Tab 10; *Record of Investigation into the Death of BG* [2021] CORC 11.

²⁴ Exhibit 1; Tab 2, Tab 3 and Tab 10; *Record of Investigation into the Death of BG* [2021] CORC 11.

²⁵ T 12; Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p. 8 and Tab 3.

²⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p. 5.

²⁷ T 14; Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p. 5 – 8

²⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p. 5 – 7 and Tab 3.

pooled water, suggesting Mr Young had not found drinkable water, then in Dr Luckin's opinion there was no reasonable prospect of survival beyond the end of 16 February 2021.²⁹

32. A 300 metre hub search on 19 and 21 February 2021 did not provide any further information.³⁰
33. Air search activities re-engaged on 22 February 2021, with Blackstone Police following vehicle tracks to the eastern side of the Northern Territory border, but Mr Young was still not located.³¹
34. Prior to the search and rescue operation being suspended, an independent review of the documentation of the search was conducted by an independent SAR advisor, focussing on the probability of survival and the effectiveness of the search. It was noted that the following issues had made the original defining of the probable search area difficult:³²
 - Time elapsed between the men going missing and the missing person report to police.
 - No clear intent of the missing persons to walk to a particular site established.
 - Difficulty in establishing facts as there were numerous reports Mr Young might have gone back to the Northern Territory or to another community.
 - Weather conditions in the area.
35. The size of the search area was also very large; too large to search by ground teams alone. It was assisted by air search, but even with an air search covering a larger search area, Mr Young had not been located.³³
36. It was confirmed that a 'Be on the Lookout' or BOLO, social media messaging and Emergency Alert had been distributed to the surrounding communities, including areas within the Northern Territory, but no sighting of Mr Young had been reported since Thursday, 11 February 2021.³⁴
37. The recommendation was for the search to be suspended, and the search concluded on 23 February 2021. This was endorsed by the District Superintendent and the search was formally concluded on 23 February 2021.³⁵

LATER POLICE INVESTIGATION

38. After the search concluded, the police investigation into Mr Young's disappearance continued. This included interviewing relevant witnesses and checking records to

²⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

³⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

³¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

³² Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p. 6.

³³ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

³⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

³⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

confirm Mr Young had not engaged with any government agency since his disappearance.³⁶

39. Of those witnesses, RL was obviously a person with significant information to provide. He provided a statement to police, which was signed on 16 February 2021, while the search was still on foot.³⁷ RL's wife also provided a statement to police, confirming that she had been worried when RL had not returned home by 10 February 2021 and had asked members of the community to help, but they had thought she was overreacting. When RL eventually returned home on 13 February 2021, he appeared very skinny and sick and he told her how the car had broken down, they had walked for a number of days and eventually the other two men had left him whilst he was sleeping. After he was rescued, he slept a long while to recover from his ordeal, then returned to collect his Prado and had started to look for the missing men on Monday, 15 February 2021 when police found him and recruited him to assist their search.³⁸
40. Although members of the community were understandably concerned why RL did not raise the alarm earlier, the police investigation found nothing suspicious about the circumstances. There was no evidence to suggest they had a falling out before they separated. RL told police he was feeling unwell, and it is possible the others had also begun to feel unwell and behaved out of character at that time. The evidence does suggest RL was initially upset with the other two men for leaving him as he thought they had deliberately made their way off without him. He became more concerned as time went on and when he made it home and realised they had not returned, he went and got his car moving and started looking for them, without success. When requested by police, RL willingly joined the formal search and helped them to identify where the men had first got lost, which does not indicate any wish to conceal what had occurred.
41. Further, BG's body was found and there was no sign of any criminality in relation to his death, which provides some reassurance that there are no suspicious circumstances in relation to Mr Young's disappearance. As we know, BG was found, having perished in the desert from exposure. The Police investigators concluded it was highly likely that Mr Young perished in similar circumstances as BG, and he was most likely deceased prior to the land search and rescue commencing.³⁹
42. Police have found no evidence to substantiate any criminality in relation to BG's death or Mr Young's disappearance. All the available evidence suggests they became disoriented in the heat, without ready access to water. RL managed to find his way to the road, but it seems the other two men were not so fortunate.⁴⁰
43. Mr Young appears to have led a simple life centred around family and community, so there is nothing to suggest he would willingly have left his family and the people he knew and started a new life elsewhere. Proof of life checks with various government agencies, banking institutions and police forces found no sign of Mr Young in any state or territory after his disappearance.⁴¹

³⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

³⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 5.

³⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 6 and Tab 7.

³⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

⁴⁰ T 5 – 6; Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p.4.

⁴¹ T 17.

CONCLUSION

44. The evidence before me indicates Mr Young left Docker River in the Northern Territory to travel to a small community across the border in Western Australia with two relatives. The three men crossed into Western Australia, then became stranded when their car broke down. I am told that it is not uncommon in that remote region for cars to break down and if they can find a passing car, people will usually stop to help. However, the three men were on a remote track, which made it less likely someone would come by to help them soon. They had no food or water, and the environment was harsh, so they could not simply sit and wait. Instead, they began walking to try to find a bigger road where help might come sooner.
45. One of the men, RL, became separated from the other two men. Reportedly he was more familiar with the area and he eventually made it to a road on his own where he was rescued, although he was in a distressed and exhausted state by that time. A search initiated to find the other two missing men eventually located the body of one of them, but Mr Young has never been found.⁴²
46. I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that Mr Young died on an unknown date between 12 and 15 February 2021, which is the date range from when he was last seen alive by RL and the time when BG's body was found. Similarly to BG, Mr Young's death was likely due to exposure. However, given his body has not been found and the exact circumstances of his death are unknown, I am unable to reach a definitive conclusion as to his cause of death, noting he could potentially have come to harm from interaction with an animal (such as a snake bite) or had a medical event given he had untreated diabetes. Therefore, Mr Young's cause of death must remain unascertained.
47. Noting the above, I also consider Mr Young's death most likely arose accidentally as a result of exposure, but I cannot exclude natural causes so I will leave his manner as death as open.
48. I express my condolences to Mr Young's foster mother and biological mother, as well as his other family members and friends, for the loss of Mr Young. To lose such a young man so suddenly and in uncertain circumstances has no doubt caused them significant grief and left them with many questions. I hope that the outcome of this inquest at least gives them some closure, although I understand that will be difficult without his body being found. If any remains are ever located that might be Mr Young's, all efforts will be made through DNA samples already obtained to identify them, using the information already obtained, to ensure that Mr Young's family get the final answers they understandably desire.⁴³

S H Linton
Acting State Coroner
7 July 2026

⁴² T 15.

⁴³ T 18.

I certify that the preceding paragraph(s) comprise the reasons for decision of the Coroner's Court of Western Australia.

DEPUTY STATE CORONER S Linton

7 JULY 2026