

**Case Number**  
MG1700827

**Date**  
07/01/17

**Deputy**  
M.CHARMAN

Primary Narrative

**CORONER'S INVESTIGATION NARRATIVE**

**Coroner Case #:** 17-075

**Synopsis:**

On July 1, 2017 at approximately 1207 hours, dispatch advised me that they received a call on 911 that someone had found a body in the Merced River but the reporting party lost cell service and we were unable to get any more information. I drove to the Briceburg area to check but was advised that the reporting party called back and said that it was near Bagby Recreation Area. Deputy Atkinson checked the area and located the body at the following coordinates: N 37\* 35.731' x W -120\* 04.716'. I responded along with SAR Units and was given a ride to the location. We found what appeared to be a male subject face down on the surface of the water that had obviously been submerged for an extended period of time as the body was very bloated and decomposing. The body was naked except for 1 Vans shoe. The shoe was consistent with the description of Ronnie Cole who had gone missing in the river 8 days prior(refer to report number MG1700802). We were able to collect the body in a coroner bag designed for water recoveries before transporting it back to the Bagby Recreation area. The family of Ronnie Cole was waiting at the ramp. I informed them that we had located a subject that could not be confirmed as Ronnie but that I believed it to be him. They advised me that Ronnie had gotten a new tattoo on his forearm that read "Cole" in cursive writing. The body was transported to the Mariposa County Sheriff's Office to wait for transport. I was able to then do a more thorough check of the body and found a tattoo matching the one described by the family. The deceased was turned over to A&R Mortuary Services to be transported to the Stanislaus County Coroner's Office.

**Details:** *(Witness Statement(s), Terminal Event, Medical History):*

On July 1, 2017 at approximately 1207 hours, I was dispatched to a report of a body found in the river. Dispatch reported that they were called on 911 and told that the reporting party had found a body in the river but the call disconnected and they were not able to get any more information. Ronnie Cole had gone missing in the Merced River on June 23, 2017 so I assumed that this could be related and responded to the Briceburg area of the Merced River. I got to the Railroad Flat area when dispatch advised that the reporting party called back and said that they would meet at Bagby. Deputy Atkinson responded to the area and was told that the body was marked with a flag. He located the body and confirmed that the person was deceased at 1306 hours. I was informed that the body was located by Jesse Cole and Bill Long, who had been searching the area for Ronnie Cole.

I responded to Bagby along with Search and Rescue Units. We boarded Deputy Atkinson's boat and were taken to the body. I was able to observe what appeared to be a white male subject that was face down at the surface of the water, being pushed against an underwater tree by the current. On top of the subject, I could see that there was a thick layer of mud/soot and the body was very bloated and decomposing. The deceased was naked except for one shoe, which was a dark colored Vans shoe. The shoe, body size, location, and state of the body were consistent with the missing subject, Ronnie Cole.

The deceased was pulled to the boat by a Search and Rescue Swimmer and put in a Coroner Bag designed for water recoveries as it lets water escape from the corners of the bag. The deceased was secured on the boat and taken to the Bagby Boat Launch where it was then also secured in another Coroner bag.

Ronnie Cole's family was waiting at the launch as they had heard that Ronnie was found. I informed the family, which included Ronnie's father, Frank Cole, that a subject was recovered and that I believed it to be Ronnie but could not give a positive identification due to the circumstances. They informed me that Ronnie was wearing Vans shoes and that he had recently got a new tattoo of the name "Cole" in cursive writing across his upper forearm. I told them that I would attempt to check further but had not been able to see that initially.

The deceased was transported to the Mariposa County Sheriff's Office to await transport and so a proper preliminary examination could be done. Upon arrival at the office, both bags were opened and I was able to roll the deceased over to inspect the front side. I was able to wipe some of the mud/soot away and located a tattoo consistent with the one described by Ronnie's family. The face was too disfigured for me to identify as Ronnie. No further evidence was able to be identified.

The deceased, believed to be Ronnie Cole, was turned over to driver Matt Mejia of A&R Mortuary Services where he was transferred to the Stanislaus County Coroner's Office. I spoke with Frank Cole again and informed him that I was able to locate a tattoo on the deceased that matches Ronnie's.

**Preliminary Exam:** *(Coroner, Date, Time, Location of Exam, Clothing, Marks, Scars, Tattoos.):*

The exam was conducted by me, Detective Mike Charman. This occurred both in the Bagby Lake/Merced River area as well as at the Mariposa County Sheriff's Office. The deceased had only one Vans shoe on the right foot. I was also able to identify a tattoo depicting "Cole" on his left upper forearm. Nothing else was identified due to the bloated and decomposed state of the body.

**Scene Examination/Where Death Confirmed:** *(Inside/Outside, Weather Condition, Temperature, Evidence/Property Collection):*

The deceased was located and confirmed dead in the water up-river from the Bagby Recreation Area. The water temperature was approximately 60 degrees with a slight current.

**Decedent Position/Condition:** *(Supine, Prone, etc./ Lividity, Rigor Mortis, Cyanosis, Wounds, IV's, Catheters, Medications Given, etc.):*

The deceased was located floating on the surface of the water and facing down with the face underwater. The body was severely bloated and beginning to decompose. There was a thick layer of mud/soot on top of the body. No life saving measures were taken due to the obvious signs of being dead for an extended period of time.

**Symptoms Prior To Death:**

Ronnie Cole was swimming in the river with friends when he was observed by some un-involved subjects to get pulled under the water by the current and swept downstream.

**Special Conditions:** *(CPR, Life Saving Attempts):*

No measures were taken due to the fact that the body had already begun to decompose.

**Method of Decedent Identification:** *(Photo, Relative/Acquaintance, other):*

The deceased is believed to be Ronnie Ray Cole due to the fact that the deceased matches the physical descriptions of Cole, was wearing a shoe that matches the pair supposedly worn by Cole when he was swept downriver, and the tattoo of "Cole" on his upper forearm.

**Decedent Personal Info:** *(Physical Description, Marital Status, Spouse, DDL, SSN, Clothing, Marks, etc.):*

The deceased is believed to be Ronnie Ray Cole who is 19 years old (02/16/1998) and unmarried. Ronnie is described as being approximately 6 foot tall and weighing 150 pounds. The deceased was found to have only one shoe on and a tattoo of "Cole" on his forearm.

**Primary Occupation Info:** *(Type of Work, Years in Occupation, Employer):*

Ronnie Cole worked for his father doing tree work.

**Medical History:** *(Doctor, Address, Phone Number, Last Seen, Diagnosis / Last Hospitalized, Hospital Name, Hospital Phone Number, Hospital Doctor, Hospital Diagnosis):*

Unknown prior health issues.

**Death Certificate Information:**

1. **Date/Time Last Seen Alive:** June 23, 2017 around 1500 hours
  - a.) By Whom: Brandy Willey
2. **Date/Time Discovered:** July 1, 2017 around 1230 hours
  - a.) By Whom: Jessie Cole and Bill Long
3. **Date/Time Pronounced Dead:** July 1, 2017 at 1306 hours

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- a.) By Whom: Deputy Atkinson
- 4. **Date/Time of Death Confirmation:** July 1, 2017 at 1306 hours
- a.) By Whom: Deputy Atkinson

**Terminal Event Information:**

- 1. **Event Occurred at Work:** (Yes/No): No
- 2. **Estimated Date/Time of Event:** June 23, 2017 around 1500 hours
- 3. **Location of Event Causing Death:** (Number, Street, City, Zip): Cable Rock of the Merced River near Briceburg
- 4. **Describe How Event Occurred:** (Auto Collision, Hanging, etc.): Swimming in river when the current swept him under water and downstream

**Requested:** (Autopsy, B/A, Narcotic, Other): Full autopsy, Abuse Screen, Blood test

**Transportation/Mortuary Info:** (Date/Time, By Whom, Location): July 1, 2017 at approximately 1600 hours, the deceased was turned over to A&R Mortuary Services to be transported to the Stanislaus County Coroner's Office.

**Notification of Next of Kin:** (Name, Address, Phone, Date/Time of Notification, By Whom/Agency):

Frank Cole, father of Ronnie Cole, and many other family members, were present when Cole was recovered in the river and notified by me.

**Property Sealed by Coroner:** (Residence/Vehicle, Date/Time): N/A

**Fingerprints:** (Taken By, Date/Time): None

**Photographs:** (Taken By, Date/Time): Photographs were taken by me throughout the recovery

**Disposition of Personal Effects:** None

**Follow-up:**

**Attachments**

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Approved by : SGT.TOTTEN Date : 07/01/2017 10:28 PM