

Misery Point & Misery Hill

It was a great pleasure to be part of a walking group on Monday 20 September led by Greg, and in the company of Wally, Richard & Peter H, and to see for the first time, Misery Point & Hill. My late husband, Peter Davis, enjoyed walking in this area and spoke to me of it in glowing terms. Peter was intrigued by the above names, and spent quite some time trying to discover why they were chosen. He came across the following story in the National Library in an autobiography of a Mr Shumack, an early settler in the area.

About 1866 a shearer, Arthur Webb, took up a selection below what is now Misery Hill, on the west bank of the Molonglo River. He arranged for a quiet and reliable old man called Develin to look after the place during his absences. Develin kept a few horses. One evening Arthur Webb returned to his place but found no trace of old man Develin; it was clear he hadn't been there for some time. A search was made, but there was no sign of him. The theory was that he may have gone down to the Molonglo River for water, fallen in and drowned. Soon after Arthur Webb sold the property.

A couple of years later Thomas Southwell of Ginninderra was out boundary riding and his dog ran a bush rat into a hollow log. Southwell found a pair of boots and human remains beside the log, which was two miles from Webb's former house. The police came and removed the remains, which were no doubt those of old man Develin. Many theories were advanced as to the cause of death, but the mystery was never solved.

In 1907 Christopher Donnelly told this story to Mr Shumack. A few nights previously, Christy pitched his tent near the spring on the property that had been owned by Arthur Webb forty years earlier. One evening he finished his supper and filled his pipe. He was about to light it when he saw an old man, a stranger with a long beard, coming up the gully towards him. Christy looked around for something for him to sit down on and the old man disappeared. A couple of nights later he saw the same person. This time he kept his eyes fixed on the old man, but when he was close he disappeared - he seemed to sink into the ground.

Mr Shumack told him about old man Develin and his mysterious disappearance. Christy said, "Some people don't believe in ghosts, but if this wasn't a ghost-what did I see? I never heard about this disappearance you've told me about. I tell you I saw that old man clearly. I won't stay there another night." Christy went straight back and moved his camp a mile and a half west, which meant he had to carry water a mile to where he made camp.

Was the mysterious disappearance of old man Develin on the property across the river and below the hill the reason for the names of Misery Point and Misery Hill? We will never know.