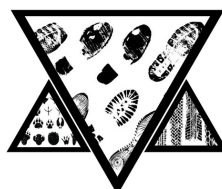


Tracking Column

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THE WAY OF TRACKING © KYT WALKEN



The Richardson Case, 1786.

One of the first cases with footwear evidence presented in Court was the Richardson case from Kirkcudbright, Scotland in 1786.

The case depicted the fatal stabbing of a young woman.

As we can read in the deposition, the investigator tracked the footprints that actually left the scene: the perpetrator's shoes appeared to be "heavily nailed and patched". Tracings were made of these impressions and later the shoes of Richardson were identified as the source.

The words at the top "1st October, 1786 measure of the print of the foot of the person who murdered Elizabeth Hughsan." "2 October 1786 applied to William Richardson's foot and fits it exactly. That is it fits the sole of the shoe. The nicks agreeing exactly with the heel."

During this case involving the murder of a young girl, the investigating officer located footwear impressions in a marsh near the cottage where the girl had lived. The trail of impressions was followed, and a few drops of blood and a bloody handprint on a step were discovered. The footwear impressions were described as boot prints and were observed to indicate a man in a running gait due to their deep impressions in the mud. Upon examination of the impressions the investigating officer noticed that the boot prints appeared to have new patches and a lot of nails in the outsole. The officer made a crude, but effective, plaster cast of the impressions. He would later compare the casts against the boots of individuals who appeared at the funeral of the victim, and it was through this process that he discovered the identity of the murder.

For over 200 years forensic examiners have been comparing unknown footwear impressions to known shoes of individuals. In performing these comparisons, examiners have utilized a variety of methods and techniques to arrive at a single conclusion. In a complete and unbiased examination the examiner must integrate together four basic strengths of that examination, 1) understanding of the anatomy of the human foot, 2) understanding the construction of the shoe itself, 3) understanding the comparison and decision making process, and, 4) understanding the proper and effective method in presenting the findings in a court of law. Each function has its place within the analysis and decision making process, but together they assist in arriving at the final conclusion."

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