

Mount Gambier man Ryan Anthony Chambers declared dead after 17-year search

ABC South East SA / By Sam Bradbrook

Posted Tue 14 Mar 2023 at 4:07am, updated Tue 14 Mar 2023 at 4:54am



Ryan Chambers has not been seen since he went missing in India in August 2005.

(Supplied: Di and Jock Chambers)

A South Australian man who has been missing for more than 17 years has officially been declared dead after exhaustive searches failed to find him.

In a judgement handed down on Friday, South Australian Supreme Court Justice Anne Bampton declared Mount Gambier man Ryan Anthony Chambers dead after he was last seen on August 24, 2005.

Mr Chambers was 21 when he travelled with his friend John Booker to India for a backpacking holiday.

He was last seen in the northern city of Rishikesh, where he was staying at the Ved Niketan Ashram, a

Key points:

- Ryan Chambers was last seen on August 24, 2005
- His family and Australian and Indian authorities have searched for him for more than 17 years
- Mr Chambers' missing person case had been widely publicised in India and Australia

yoga and meditation retreat.

After eating dinner on August 23, Mr Chambers told Mr Booker he was going to bed, but the next morning he was missing. Mr Chambers' wallet, passport and other personal items were left in his room.

An Indian police report from an employee of the ashram stated Mr Chambers was seen leaving the property wearing only blue shorts at 5am on August 24.

He would never be seen or heard from again.

Presumption of life 'displaced'

In her findings, Justice Bampton wrote the evidence showed the "presumption of continuance of Ryan's life has been displaced and gives rise to the presumption of his death".



A mural of Ryan Chambers in Cadell, South Australia, created as part of the Unmissables documentary series. *(Supplied: Marleena Forward)*

"Investigations by Ryan's family, the Indian police, and DFAT have provided no information regarding Ryan's disappearance," Justice Bampton wrote in her judgement.

"Ryan's bank account has remained untouched since his disappearance."

Justice Bampton also wrote Mr Chambers was in regular contact with his parents via phone calls and emails in the lead up to his disappearance and had no reason to "deliberately or voluntarily" cease

contact with his friends or family.

"Jock (Mr Chambers' father) stated Ryan was not in any financial trouble, nor did he have any enemies and he is unaware of any threats having been made towards Ryan," Justice Bampton wrote.

"Jock said Ryan had no trade or language skills that would have allowed him to live independently in India with ease."

In an affidavit presented to the court, Mr Chambers' father Jock said his son had called him on the day before his disappearance and said he wished to return home.



Ryan Chamber's parents Jock and Di. *(ABC South East SA: Kate Hill)*

In a separate affidavit, Mr Booker said he had noticed Mr Chambers hadn't slept for about three days prior to going missing and was having "quite marked mood swings".

17-year search fruitless

Justice Bampton wrote that after not seeing his friend before 11am on August 24, Mr Booker spent the rest of the day looking around Rishikesh at places they would frequent during their time in the city.

His disappearance was officially reported to Indian police and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on August 25.

What followed was years of search attempts in Rishikesh and other parts of India, including an initial two-and-a-half week search involving Mr Booker, Mr Chambers' family, Indian police and officers from the Australian High Commissioner to Delhi.

Coca Cola also attached missing persons posters to its delivery trucks and crates travelling throughout the country.

Despite posters being widely circulated in English and Hindi throughout the states of Uttarakhand, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, police have never received information relating to the missing man.

The case also featured in an episode of the documentary series the Unmissables, with a film crew following the family to India in 2011.

As Mr Chambers' missing persons case is still open in India, the country could not supply a death certificate to his family, prompting them to seek a ruling in the Supreme Court.

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