

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:28,000

Good evening.

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00:00:28,000 --> 00:00:36,000

There are strange tales that run through many different human societies and exert such a hold in our imagination that they pop up time and time again.

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00:00:36,000 --> 00:00:39,000

Tonight we look at two of those legends.

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00:00:39,000 --> 00:00:46,000

The Phantom Hitchhiker is a modern myth, the stranger who appears at the roadside accepts a ride and then disappears.

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00:00:46,000 --> 00:00:57,000

But first a more ancient belief, the power of the curse, like the earls of North-Esk, who were haunted by a green lady whose appearance at Ethy Castle in Tayside

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00:00:57,000 --> 00:00:59,000

means one of them will die.

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00:00:59,000 --> 00:01:04,000

But our example tonight is a Celtic tale that happened not so very long ago.

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00:01:04,000 --> 00:01:09,000

The remote and beautiful islands of the outer Hebrides.

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00:01:09,000 --> 00:01:14,000

Their isolation means they've been only lightly touched by the 20th century.

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00:01:14,000 --> 00:01:20,000

The islands are much as they were when the Vikings first landed over a thousand years ago.

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00:01:20,000 --> 00:01:25,000

And the old superstitions are still a part of everyday life.

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00:01:25,000 --> 00:01:33,000

With very religious, whether we're Christian or not, with very, very religious, even those who perhaps have abandoned God,

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00:01:33,000 --> 00:01:37,000

are still got that superstitious side to their natures.

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00:01:37,000 --> 00:01:43,000

This is all very much part of our makeup and graveyard particularly.

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00:01:43,000 --> 00:01:54,000

In this ancient and overgrown burial place, within the grounds of the ruined Hau-Mor chapel, lie the remains of the clan of Clan Randalld, buried here since 1490.

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00:01:55,000 --> 00:02:01,000

Randalld MacDonald is the 24th Chief of Clan Randalld.

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00:02:01,000 --> 00:02:04,000

He believes the clan has its own special protection.

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00:02:04,000 --> 00:02:09,000

The sad thing is that anybody who actually tampers with the property of the clan,

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00:02:09,000 --> 00:02:15,000

have never really had any advantage and often has not had met with some evilness,

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00:02:15,000 --> 00:02:18,000

and the property has always been returned.

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00:02:18,000 --> 00:02:25,000

There are those who believe that many of the ancient medieval artifacts on the Hebrides have strange, mystical powers.

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00:02:25,000 --> 00:02:31,000

The modern word might be cursed, but I'd like to use something more remote than that.

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00:02:31,000 --> 00:02:38,000

It is something that holds the whole spirit together, because we've been going so many, many centuries.

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00:02:38,000 --> 00:02:44,000

Whatever it is, the power of the curse has reappeared throughout the history of the clan.

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00:02:45,000 --> 00:02:54,000

During the 1745 uprising, Redcoat soldiers broke into the clan's island graveyard, intent on

stealing the valuable St. Finan's bell.

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00:02:56,000 --> 00:02:58,000

But the bell was to be there downfall.

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00:02:58,000 --> 00:03:05,000

Whatever they did, it refused to stop its eerie, persistent ring, and attracted the attention of the local caretaker.

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00:03:05,000 --> 00:03:10,000

St. Finan's bell was returned to the clan Randalld Clan, its rightful home.

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00:03:10,000 --> 00:03:16,000

St. Finan's bell has been taken twice during the last couple of centuries.

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00:03:16,000 --> 00:03:23,000

Both times, I'm told, the people who have taken it have met an unhappy end,

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00:03:23,000 --> 00:03:27,000

but the bell has always returned to the altar.

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00:03:27,000 --> 00:03:42,000

The clan believes that whenever its property has been threatened, the curse has returned.

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00:03:44,000 --> 00:03:48,000

The clan Randalld Stone bears the ancient symbols of the clan,

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00:03:48,000 --> 00:03:55,000

and marks the resting place of Alan Moidart, famous chief and protector of the clan who died 400 years ago.

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00:03:56,000 --> 00:04:03,000

A reproduction of the gravestone was built into the walls of the clan's castle by French stone masons in 1708.

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00:04:03,000 --> 00:04:08,000

The castle took seven years to build, but was occupied for only seven years.

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00:04:08,000 --> 00:04:13,000

On the night before the clan chief died in battle, the castle was consumed by fire.

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00:04:14,000 --> 00:04:20,000

Still, the stone survived, but more recently, there was a further threat to its existence.

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00:04:20,000 --> 00:04:29,000

Early one morning about four or five years ago, the man who runs the home farm heard this chipping,

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00:04:29,000 --> 00:04:40,000

and he looked towards the castle ruins, and there was a man trying to prize out the memorial stone with a hammer and a chisel.

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00:04:41,000 --> 00:04:46,000

So he just chased him for his life. We don't know to this day who he was.

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00:04:47,000 --> 00:04:53,000

It seemed that the legend of the clan was again protecting all its ancient monuments.

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00:04:53,000 --> 00:05:01,000

But then disaster struck. The clan's most important relic, the Moidart gravestone, was stolen.

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00:05:01,000 --> 00:05:12,000

It was one morning when my niece wanted to go and look at the stone, and we went into the graveyard and she said it's not here.

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00:05:12,000 --> 00:05:16,000

I said of course it's there, just move along round the corner, but it wasn't there.

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00:05:16,000 --> 00:05:30,000

Later one of the crafters showed me a mark where the stone had obviously been dragged from the graveyard all the way along, several hundred yards, to the parking place outside the church.

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00:05:30,000 --> 00:05:38,000

As shockwaves hit the community, people wondered how the 300-weight gravestone could have been stolen without detection.

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00:05:38,000 --> 00:05:52,000

To get it out, well they must have used a small crowbar or something, and I mean it's within the wit of man, but it would have been quite a difficult determined journey to get that from chapel to boot of car.

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00:05:53,000 --> 00:05:58,000

Amongst the islanders, the theft reawakened memories of the old clan legends.

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00:05:58,000 --> 00:06:14,000

Well the local people knew that to desecrate any graveyard is really bad, and because they were so shocked, they knew that no good end would come to the story.

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00:06:15,000 --> 00:06:22,000

The search for the stone continued, but only one man knew where it was hidden, in a tiny London bed-sit.

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00:06:22,000 --> 00:06:33,000

The legends had said the grave robber would be doomed to an early death. Would the curse prove to be simply a quaint piece of history? The clan chief never stopped believing in its power.

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00:06:34,000 --> 00:06:47,000

In terms of the clan, which was nearly a thousand years, it wasn't a long time that it had gone, and I wasn't that concerned that it had gone forever. I thought that it would turn up sooner or later, somehow or other.

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00:06:48,000 --> 00:06:56,000

It was to be five years before the clan heard any news. The first signs of the missing gravestone surfaced here at the British Museum.

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00:06:57,000 --> 00:07:08,000

I was working late one night in February in the museum, and I got a phone call from the information

desk. They told me there was a gentleman there who urgently wanted to see someone.

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00:07:09,000 --> 00:07:16,000

They said he was a little upset, and so I spoke to him over the phone, and he came down to the department.

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00:07:18,000 --> 00:07:27,000

We get all sorts of inquiries on the duty desk in the department, but this was one of the most curious stories that I've been involved in.

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00:07:28,000 --> 00:07:36,000

He showed me a photo of a carved stone which he said was in a nearby flat in Houston.

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00:07:37,000 --> 00:07:52,000

He said his son had been on holiday some years previously on Southview-ist and had found it in a field and brought it back to London. He was in London for his son's funeral.

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00:07:53,000 --> 00:07:57,000

His son had died quite suddenly a week or so previously.

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00:07:58,000 --> 00:08:08,000

On the 22nd of February 1995, almost five years to the day since the stone was stolen, 33-road Lauren Mayburn died alone in a London flat.

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00:08:09,000 --> 00:08:16,000

Only a few feet away from his bed was the stone of Clan Rammelt. The coroner's verdict was death by misadventure.

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00:08:16,000 --> 00:08:27,000

I was not surprised, but when it was found in these circumstances I said it's a sort of thing that might have happened in the Celtic world, not in the heart of London.

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00:08:28,000 --> 00:08:42,000

When I first heard the stone was found, of course I was delighted, but as information gathered I was little concerned and saddened and slightly spooked by the fact of the boy's death.

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00:08:42,000 --> 00:08:50,000

And it rather brought reminiscences of the things I'd heard and the mystery of our clan.

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00:08:51,000 --> 00:08:56,000

Beneath the disquiet there was some sympathy for the outsider who'd stolen the island's heritage.

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00:08:57,000 --> 00:09:02,000

Remember everybody who live in our cities are searching for roots.

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00:09:02,000 --> 00:09:23,000

They would do anything to catch up with roots because a lot of people nowadays in the last hundred years have lost their roots and are wondering about the surface of the earth aimlessly, whereas we can describe the people we came from back to seven, eight, nine generations.

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00:09:24,000 --> 00:09:37,000

So it was that on the night of June 10th 1995 the Clan gathered at the quayside for the stone's return to its ancestral home on South Uist.

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00:09:37,000 --> 00:09:52,000

Its final journey from London was almost complete. It was to arrive as it had left in the boot of a car.

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00:09:52,000 --> 00:10:16,000

The next day the island turned out to celebrate. Among them Neil McMillan from the local historical society, who was there to give a Gaelic welcome.

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00:10:17,000 --> 00:10:32,000

They're very proud that the stone has come back and it's been the story behind it is really out of the world.

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00:10:33,000 --> 00:10:39,000

It would have found its way back but people are delighted that it is back and it's here to stay now.

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00:10:40,000 --> 00:10:50,000

And perhaps this time the curse of the Clan-Ranald Clan will finally have been laid to rest.

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00:10:51,000 --> 00:11:05,000

Some will dismiss the story as superstitious nonsense but the Clan leaders have managed to stay in power for nearly a thousand years.

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00:11:05,000 --> 00:11:08,000

So maybe Clan-Ranald do have something watching over them.

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00:11:21,000 --> 00:11:27,000

If you haven't heard of Phantom Hitchhiker's story then someone you know probably has.

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00:11:27,000 --> 00:11:35,000

It's become a modern myth, a story so appealing it's destined to be told and retold despite the fact that concrete evidence is hard to come by.

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00:11:35,000 --> 00:11:43,000

But if it was possible to track down those who'd experienced it at first hand, would their evidence stand up to closer examination?

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00:11:43,000 --> 00:11:49,000

Well tonight we talk to some individuals who say they gave a ride to a Phantom Hitchhiker.

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00:11:50,000 --> 00:12:02,000

Maria Rue and Hiel Prittorius had recently become engaged and on Good Friday in March 1968 were driving through the arid scrub of the Karoo Desert, 200 miles east of Cape Town.

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00:12:02,000 --> 00:12:10,000

They were going to meet her parents to discuss their wedding plans. The route was taking them towards Uniondale along the M9.

83

00:12:20,000 --> 00:12:46,000

Music

84

00:12:47,000 --> 00:12:49,000

Hi, you wanna lift?

85

00:12:56,000 --> 00:12:57,000

Are you alright?

86

00:12:59,000 --> 00:13:00,000

Where you going?

87

00:13:02,000 --> 00:13:05,000

You know you ought to be careful, it's dangerous out here for a young girl like you.

88

00:13:17,000 --> 00:13:18,000

Where are you?

89

00:13:20,000 --> 00:13:26,000

Puzzled and frightened Anton Legranci headed straight for the police station in the nearest town, Uniondale.

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00:13:26,000 --> 00:13:29,000

Today the station is run by warrant officer Moschert.

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00:13:29,000 --> 00:13:32,000

Sergeant Portgietter was in duty, he was alone on duty.

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00:13:34,000 --> 00:13:36,000

Sir, you got a problem?

93

00:13:36,000 --> 00:13:41,000

When Mr. Legranci came in he told Sergeant Portgietter about experience he had on the road.

94

00:13:41,000 --> 00:13:48,000

I was driving into town and I stopped to pick up the school hitchhiking. I don't know man, she just disappeared.

95

00:13:48,000 --> 00:13:50,000

What exactly do you mean just disappeared?

96

00:13:51,000 --> 00:13:59,000

Sergeant Portgietter didn't believe the man and he think the man wants to waste his time.

97

00:14:00,000 --> 00:14:02,000

I'm sorry, please just come out there with me.

98

00:14:02,000 --> 00:14:07,000

Sensing that Legranci was not joking, Snowy Portgietter agreed to go back with him to the spot.

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00:14:07,180 --> 00:14:10,180

Sergeant Portgietter didn't handle, in situations.

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00:14:11,000 --> 00:14:14,180

I think this specific situation he rattled.

101

00:14:17,500 --> 00:14:19,000

Did you see that?

102

00:14:19,000 --> 00:14:21,140

Yeah, you fiddling with those people.

103

00:14:22,140 --> 00:14:26,700

The

104

00:14:26,700 --> 00:14:31,860

Sergeant Portgate didn't rattle in situations but in this specific

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00:14:31,860 --> 00:14:38,020

situation he rattled. Did you see that? Yeah, you fiddling with the door. I didn't

106

00:14:38,020 --> 00:14:41,300

touch it! It wasn't just that, did you hear the woman laughing?

107

00:14:41,300 --> 00:14:46,660

Look Mr. Geranzi, I'm getting tired and impatient! Now we'll drive past it once

108

00:14:46,660 --> 00:14:50,900

more. This time you put the interior light on, you put your hands on the steering

109

00:14:50,900 --> 00:14:54,900

I'll be right behind you and I'll be watching.

110

00:14:54,900 --> 00:14:57,900

Hey, unlock your doors!

111

00:15:10,900 --> 00:15:11,900

Did you see that?

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00:15:11,900 --> 00:15:14,900

Yum! Listen, let's just get the hell out of here, man!

113

00:15:15,900 --> 00:15:18,900

When Sergeant Portgidou came back,

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00:15:18,900 --> 00:15:21,900

he was snow white in his face and he was rattled.

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00:15:21,900 --> 00:15:26,900

So he left the police station, he locked the station and went home.

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00:15:26,900 --> 00:15:31,900

For Snowy, the description of the girl had stirred some unsettling memories.

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00:15:31,900 --> 00:15:35,900

At about 8 o'clock this Sunday morning, Snowy confronted me

118

00:15:35,900 --> 00:15:41,900

and said, do I remember this girl that was killed in the sudden accident a few years ago?

119

00:15:45,900 --> 00:15:50,900

At McDonald had been the first officer to the scene of the crash that day.

120

00:15:50,900 --> 00:15:56,900

I found a Volkswagen Beetle off the road

121

00:15:56,900 --> 00:16:01,900

and a girl was lying on her back with her head against the one in bankment.

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00:16:01,900 --> 00:16:03,900

She had died of head injuries.

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00:16:03,900 --> 00:16:08,900

I later ascertained that her name was Maria Rue, the driver survived her.

124

00:16:08,900 --> 00:16:11,900

I explained to him what the girl actually looked like.

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00:16:11,900 --> 00:16:18,900

Which was exactly the same description that was in the Kiernsburg given by Lechronse.

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00:16:18,900 --> 00:16:21,900

The words spread around uni and Dale like wildfire.

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00:16:21,900 --> 00:16:24,900

There was a phantom hitchhiker on the N9.

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00:16:24,900 --> 00:16:29,900

Within days the newspapers got hold of the story and contacted Maria Rue's mother.

129

00:16:29,900 --> 00:16:37,900

I told her about the story and the people thought it's her daughter that is haunting in the city.

130

00:16:37,900 --> 00:16:41,900

She gave me a fine, I can get a photograph of her.

131

00:16:41,900 --> 00:16:46,900

Anton Lechronse was asked if he could recognize the girl he'd given a lift to.

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00:16:46,900 --> 00:16:48,900

Would he pick out Maria?

133

00:16:48,900 --> 00:16:50,900

That's her!

134

00:16:50,900 --> 00:16:53,900

That's her!

135

00:16:53,900 --> 00:16:58,900

Union Dale's phantom hitchhiker had been identified as Maria Rue.

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00:16:58,900 --> 00:17:00,900

There were no more sightings of her.

137

00:17:00,900 --> 00:17:04,900

I don't know if she was a woman, but she was a woman.

138

00:17:04,900 --> 00:17:09,900

There were no more sightings of her. Until two years later.

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00:17:09,900 --> 00:17:16,900

Corporal Darve Van Yasfeld was doing his national service at Utschorn Army Base, 100 miles from Union Dale.

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00:17:16,900 --> 00:17:19,900

He was on his way there to spend holidays with his girlfriend.

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00:17:19,900 --> 00:17:22,900

His journey took him along the N9.

142

00:17:22,900 --> 00:17:28,900

When I reached the intersection I saw somebody standing in the road, on the side of the road.

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00:17:29,900 --> 00:17:38,900

Just as I turned to the right, she kind of lifted her arms up.

144

00:17:38,900 --> 00:17:41,900

Like, oh no, aren't you going to stop?

145

00:17:43,900 --> 00:17:45,900

Why do you want to lift me to town?

146

00:17:53,900 --> 00:17:55,900

Put this on.

147

00:17:59,900 --> 00:18:04,900

There's a hearpiece with some music.

148

00:18:10,900 --> 00:18:16,900

I asked her to please hold tight around my waist, so that I can feel if something goes wrong.

149

00:18:28,900 --> 00:18:34,900

After a few, say, a kilometers to the bike out of Utsch, I thought she fell off.

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00:18:34,900 --> 00:18:36,900

A lot of things went through my mind.

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00:18:36,900 --> 00:18:41,900

I turned around, I wanted to see if I still had somebody with me.

152

00:18:41,900 --> 00:18:43,900

There was nobody.

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00:18:43,900 --> 00:18:49,900

I turned around, I went back with a motorcycle, looked if there was anybody lying around the road.

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00:18:49,900 --> 00:18:51,900

And then I got a fright.

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00:18:51,900 --> 00:18:54,900

I saw the helmet, it's back on.

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00:18:54,900 --> 00:19:00,900

The earphone is just lying there, and then I just had to move off.

157

00:19:00,900 --> 00:19:04,900

Because I realised in the garden that I'd pick somebody up.

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00:19:05,900 --> 00:19:07,900

Darvi was badly shaken.

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00:19:07,900 --> 00:19:12,900

Not knowing what could have happened to the girl, he fled to the safety of Uniondale.

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00:19:12,900 --> 00:19:16,900

The couple Darvi van Jaarsveld also said she was a shorty's girl.

161

00:19:16,900 --> 00:19:21,900

Dark hair, she was a brunette, short hair, and she had slacks on in the jersey.

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00:19:21,900 --> 00:19:25,900

And that was the description of the grantee as well.

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00:19:25,900 --> 00:19:29,900

I'm telling you, it scared the living die-lights out of me.

164

00:19:29,900 --> 00:19:32,900

I didn't think there was something wrong at that time.

165

00:19:32,900 --> 00:19:36,900

I didn't notice that it was a spirit or something.

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00:19:36,900 --> 00:19:39,900

But I did feel strange.

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00:19:40,900 --> 00:19:44,900

Any suspicions Darvi might have had were reinforced when he returned to his bike.

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00:19:44,900 --> 00:19:47,900

The headset was ruined.

169

00:19:47,900 --> 00:19:49,900

It was completely done.

170

00:19:49,900 --> 00:19:53,900

It was melted, you know, it was unusable at all.

171

00:19:55,900 --> 00:19:58,900

And the helmet too turned out to be unusable.

172

00:19:59,900 --> 00:20:05,900

The helmet that the lady put on, this is the helmet.

173

00:20:05,900 --> 00:20:12,900

And nobody worn this helmet after she had put the helmet on.

174

00:20:12,900 --> 00:20:15,900

Because even my girlfriend wouldn't wear it again.

175

00:20:15,900 --> 00:20:18,900

She was just scared.

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00:20:21,900 --> 00:20:25,900

The third appearance of the Phantom hitchhiker was in 1980.

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00:20:25,900 --> 00:20:30,900

On Good Friday, André Hötzi was driving along the N9 past Uniondale,

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00:20:30,900 --> 00:20:34,900

looking for a friend who he thought might have run out of petrol in the desert.

179

00:20:36,900 --> 00:20:39,900

All of a sudden I felt hands around my waist.

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00:20:39,900 --> 00:20:44,900

I could actually feel the pressure and as I looked down I saw the hands.

181

00:20:44,900 --> 00:20:47,900

I was very, very scared.

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00:20:47,900 --> 00:20:50,900

And well I felt that I must get away from that place.

183

00:20:50,900 --> 00:20:53,900

That's when I accelerated.

184

00:20:53,900 --> 00:20:57,900

And I said at about 150 or 160 watts he gave me a few wax against her head.

185

00:20:57,900 --> 00:21:00,900

And then she just disappeared.

186

00:21:00,900 --> 00:21:03,900

Never saw nobody standing next to her over nothing.

187

00:21:04,900 --> 00:21:08,900

Once again it was Uniondale that was the first to hear of the latest sighting.

188

00:21:09,900 --> 00:21:12,900

I think I've seen the ghost.

189

00:21:12,900 --> 00:21:15,900

I was riding my bike down the dirt road.

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00:21:15,900 --> 00:21:18,900

André Hötzi was a third confirmed sighting.

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00:21:18,900 --> 00:21:22,900

But since then there have been numerous unconfirmed reports of the Phantom hitchhiker.

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00:21:22,900 --> 00:21:24,900

And they were real.

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00:21:24,900 --> 00:21:30,900

There have been lots of theories as to why the ghost of Maria Roux should continue to haunt the N9

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00:21:30,900 --> 00:21:33,900

since that fateful Easter of 1968.

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00:21:33,900 --> 00:21:38,900

Local journalist Janne Meijer has been following the story for over 20 years.

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00:21:39,900 --> 00:21:45,900

One of the theories why she apparently can't get, can't go to rest for good

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00:21:45,900 --> 00:21:50,900

is that she was fast asleep in the car when the accident happened.

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00:21:50,900 --> 00:21:52,900

And she didn't prepare herself for death.

199

00:21:52,900 --> 00:21:56,900

She dearly wanted to finalize her wedding arrangements.

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00:21:56,900 --> 00:22:02,900

And the theory is that she will carry on until she reached her destination.

201

00:22:04,900 --> 00:22:10,900

The Phantom hitchhiker story first came to prominence in Britain in the 1950s.

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00:22:10,900 --> 00:22:15,900

Particularly on the A38 between Wellington and Taunton in Somerset.

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00:22:15,900 --> 00:22:19,900

But the earliest sighting was of a mysterious man in black

204

00:22:19,900 --> 00:22:23,900

forever striding along the road towards some Boswells in the border regions.

205

00:22:23,900 --> 00:22:28,900

The witness, a Miss Louisa Scott, didn't actually call him a Phantom hitchhiker.

206

00:22:28,900 --> 00:22:32,900

But that might be because the date was 1893. Good night.

207

00:22:58,900 --> 00:23:00,900

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