

Kevin Cameron's Photographs

Sid Slee described in conversation in 2003 that, in the early 1980s, he assisted an experienced Bushman and Tracker of aboriginal descent, Kevin Cameron, search for evidence of thylacines. Kevin and Sid's son Ian (below) found many tracks and took casts, found kangaroo kills and photographed a thylacine. The casts were considered by the WA museum as being genuine and taken from 'a deformed kangaroo'.



The photographs taken by Kevin Cameron have sparked controversy. Experts agree that the creature in the photographs could only be a thylacine. It is digging at the base of a large tree.

Cameron was only able to take photographs of the thylacine without its head in view.

People have questioned the authenticity of Cameron's Photographs.¹ When published in New Scientist magazine in 1986, readers noted that:

1. There were concerns that Kevin purported said he took the photos 'alone' but other photos show a shadow of another person who may be holding a rifle. This leading to speculation the creature photographed had been shot and the shot wounds hidden by the way the photographs were taken.
2. The negatives of the film roll used to take the photographs had been cut with some frames missing.
3. The shadows in the photos were different, perhaps suggesting that they were taken several hours apart.
4. The thylacine seems to be in same posture in both, suggesting it is dead with rigor mortis or possibly stuffed.

It is important to consider these concerns.

In relation to point 1, it is was certainly known to Sid that Kevin did his tracking in the company of Sid's son Ian. His son's shadow in one frame should not be any surprise. Could either of them have shot and killed the creature in the picture? Possibly, but certainly not until after both photographs were taken, as described below (point 3). Sid did mention that Kevin and Ian shot kangaroos to use as bait to lure thylacines.

In relation to point 2, during the 1980s, it was common practice for photo developing agencies (eg one's local pharmacist) to excise blurred or technically flawed negatives from a roll of film and only return negatives and prints of photographs that would be worth developing. I doubt Kevin had particular photography skills and probably did what all of us did then when getting photos developed back then with the typical result. That being the case, I don't think a cut negative roll and missing frames has any particular relevance to the authenticity of the photographs or not. What we do know is that genuine negatives exist of the photographs in question.

¹ http://www.naturalworlds.org/thylacine/history/extvssurv/mainland/alleged_mainland_sightings_3.htm

Point 3 is a case of poor analysis. When evaluated properly it is easy to confirm that the photos were taken at about the same time, as indicated by Kevin Cameron, rather than taken hours apart. The confusion about the shadows is due to the use of ***different camera angles*** between the shots, rather than the passage of time.

It is apparent in the photographs (see attached powerpoint) that the main shadow, cast by the large Marri tree obscuring the creature's front portion, falls on the same balga bush in both photographs.

What has changed is only the position of the photographer and therefore the perspective of the photographs. The photographer has clearly moved a few metres to the right in taking the second picture when compared to the first picture. The fact that the Marri tree shadow crosses the same balga bush means the photos were definitely taken contemporaneously.

In relation to point four, if the creature was not moving, the change in perspective should have resulted in the back appearing slightly more arched and the tail slightly more angled in the second photograph when compared to the first. The exact opposite is the case. That is, the back is less arched and tail flatter in the second photograph. These postural changes are consistent with what Kevin Cameron said – the creature was digging at the time the photographs were taken.

It is difficult not to conclude these are photographs of a live thylacine taken in bush that is exactly the type of bush seen in the Nannup area in the early 1980s.

Spriv (ThisNannupLife)
08/07/2017