



**THE
DRAGON'S
TREASURE**

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INTRODUCTION

Treasure!

The word dares history hunters to dream of undiscovered riches. We dig for clues buried in legends, long lost or forgotten. The stories we find lead us on adventures back in time. The journey begins with the unravelling of fact and fiction.

And every treasure needs a map ...

The Dragon's Treasure was inspired by a curious report published in an old newspaper. The article concerned the discovery of a rusted box in a cave near the Western Australian coast. A frayed leather cord kept it from falling to pieces. Folded inside

was a parchment dated 10 May 1656. Written in old Dutch script, the ink faded with age almost beyond recognition, it described a calamity that had befallen a ship after it ran aground. A map indicated ‘The Dragon’s Reef’ and a cave near the coast where treasure was hidden.

Was the story true or fabricated? Could a document that old be genuine?

Over the years, sagas of lost treasures and shipwreck castaways stranded on grim shores at the end of the known world have fuelled many tall tales. Fables grew. Some persisted. Treasure fever waxed and waned as real and imaginary clues were discovered.

Over time, history’s secrets became legends that were woven into myths — all with their origins in the truth.

On a summer morning in January 1931, an ancient mystery gave up the first of its secrets.

Sly old fox was skulking around the camp again. Fred saw it in the flush of dawn light, silhouetted against the white sand. He tugged the blankets off the shoulders of his brothers, Don and Dan. 'Wake up,' he whispered.

Their sister, Madge, yawned. 'Where are you going?'

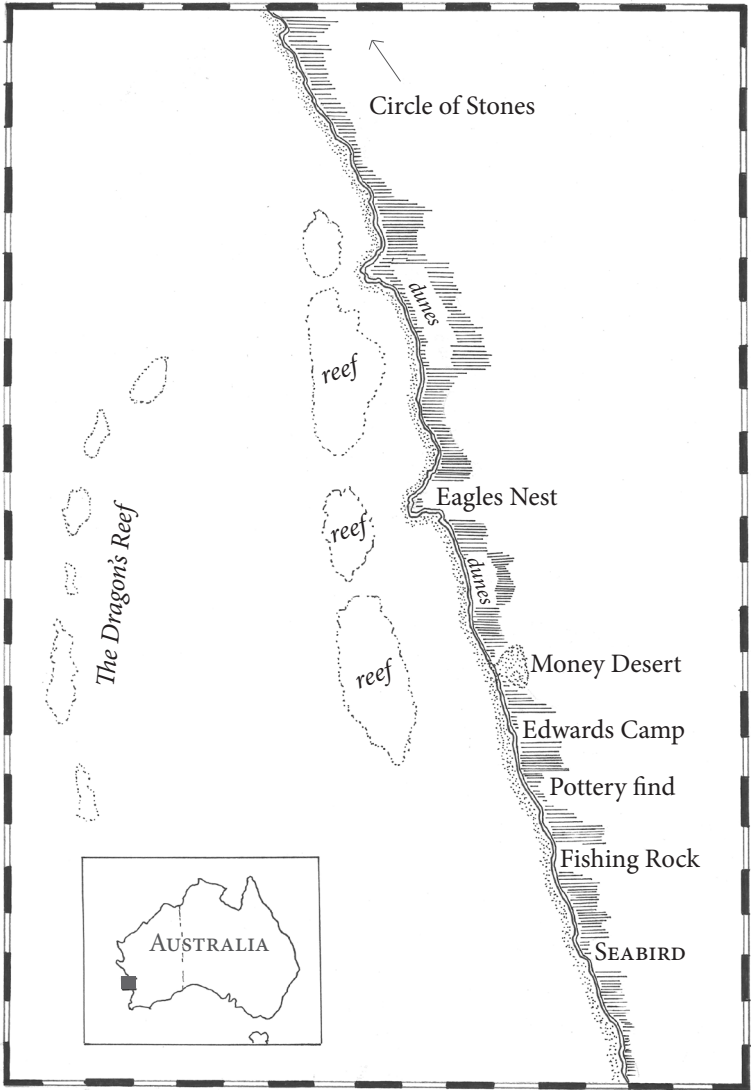
Four bleary-eyed kids were soon on a fox hunt. They reached the tideline as the sun rose over the dunes, spreading its golden glow over a long stretch of beach. Eight-year-old Fred led the others as they tracked the pawprints heading north.

Fred was one of fourteen children born into the

pioneering Edwards family. His grandparents were some of the earliest European settlers in the area and his grandfather had built the first mud cottage on the Moore River flats. Later, the family had acquired more land and established a business, breeding cattle and sheep and driving them along an isolated coastal stock route.

Woodlands, the family homestead, was built beside a brook on the floodplains of the Moore River, sixteen kilometres inland from the sea. But closer to the coast, along a track not well travelled, Fred's father had constructed a summer holiday camp for his family. The rough hut, set behind the dunes, was made from timber that had washed up along the coast. All the children had helped their father collect Oregon beams, planks of oak, teak and pine, and other debris from the beach.

Fred's mum cooked in a makeshift camp oven and served meals on a driftwood bench. A cow supplied the camp with fresh milk. Drinking water came from



The Edwards Camp and surrounds.

a natural well. An old-timer, Levi Jones, had found the water source after watching bees and swallows flying in and out of the bush. 'There are hidden wells all along the coast,' he told Mr Edwards, 'if you know where to look.'

The coastal country around the camp was the children's playground. That January morning in 1931, the Edwards kids hurried along the familiar beach. Fox tracks zigzagged through the sand, then turned and headed inland through an opening in the first line of dunes.

With a nod to the others, Fred dug his toes into soft sand and sun-dried seaweed. He chased the fox up a steep dune where storms had eroded the beach. Fred clambered to the top and waited for Madge and his brothers to catch up. 'It went that way,' he said.

The fox tracks led to a flat patch of sand walled by dunes. A glint reflected in the morning sunlight caught Fred's eye. At the foot of a slope, he crouched down and picked up two old coins resting on the

surface of hardened sand. 'Have a look at this,' he shouted. 'It says 1615.'

Fred pressed the other coin into the palm of Don's hand. On close examination, he distinguished the date: '1655'.

'Look around,' Madge said, 'there might be more.'

On hands and knees, the children sifted the sand for more old money. Dan found fragments of aged wood. Madge was puzzled by a corroded piece of metal. 'What's this?'

Fred rubbed it between his fingers to remove the crust of sand. 'Looks like a hinge,' he guessed, 'maybe from an old box.'

Beside fragments of rotted wood, Don and Dan spotted the shine of old silver. They collected small oval-shaped coins about the size of a thumbnail. Madge picked up others minted with decorative markings. Fred found a strip of silver sticking out of the sand, three inches long and an inch wide. One side was smooth. The other side had patterns stamped



Some of the treasure found by the Edwards children.

into the flattened surface that appeared to be Chinese, Fred thought, or Japanese. He couldn't be sure.

'Do you think it's from a shipwreck?' Madge asked.

'Pirate treasure!' Don exclaimed with a grin. 'And we're the lucky finders.'

The Edwards children were no strangers to shipwrecks. Over the years, numerous voyages had ended dramatically on the rugged Western Australian coast. The children had grown up with stories of the wooden schooner *Seaflower*, lost in 1923, and the *Seabird*, which ran aground in 1874. Other ships had vanished on the offshore reefs in the general proximity of the Edwards summer camp. All the children enjoyed beachcombing. The family had collected timber along the coast for as long as they could remember. Fred's father said the beams and planks he had used to build the holiday camp came from old ships.

The fire flickered brightly the night Fred, Don, Dan and Madge brought their hoard of old money back to the family camp. After dinner, all the Edwards kids

passed the coins around. The dates that were visible were not from recent wrecks. The coins pointed to a much older ship. Mr Edwards stared into the ruby embers and raised his eyebrows. ‘Make no mistake.’ His voice was barely a whisper. ‘Old-timers were right when they said there was an ancient wreck nearby.’

The following morning, the children guided their father back to the dunes where they’d found the coins. Fred christened the site ‘the Money Desert.’ ‘If there’s any more treasure here,’ Mr Edwards said, ‘it’ll be buried under all this sand.’ The children scurried about and started digging. Soon the glint of silver appeared near another rusted hinge. They unearthed more coins with dates ranging from 1618 to 1648, some bearing what looked like a man’s head and others with writing in a foreign language. In total, forty-five silver pieces were found.

Newspaper reports that the children had discovered ancient coins in dunes north of the Moore River sparked the interest of treasure hunters. The location

of the find and the dates on the coins indicated that they could be a clue to the whereabouts of a long-lost ship. Strangers turned up at the family holiday camp seeking directions to the Money Desert.

Meanwhile, the windswept coast was about to reveal another secret.