

## BOOK REVIEW

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### A Review of *Friction Ridge Skin*

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**REFERENCE:** Cowger, J., *Friction Ridge Skin*, Elsevier, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, NY 10017, 1983, ISBN 0-444-00770-9, 219 pages, \$39.50 hardcover.

This book belongs in the "must have" category. It attempts to address the subject of personal identification based on fingerprints, palmprints, and soleprints. It covers the taking of prints, the rudiments of classification, the documentation of prints (latent and otherwise) by photography, and the comparison of prints. Mr. Cowger writes well, and the chapters on the taking of prints, photography, and classification are clear and succinct. The photographic illustrations accompanying these sections are particularly apt and obviously have been selected with great care. Still, there is little in these sections that is particularly novel, or that has not been addressed in a more expanded form in other standard texts. The principal virtues of this text lie elsewhere.

The text covers the comparison of inked prints with latent prints from a unique and much needed approach. When it comes to comparisons, most other texts take the approach of "well, you just do it," abandoning the reader to his or her own devices. The present text explains *how* to go about it—how to use patterns to suggest a candidate finger, how to orient the evidence fingerprint or palmprint, recognition of prints of the medial and proximal phalanges, how to handle obscured minutiae and tonal reversals, when to tolerate and how to interpret distortion and rotation in evidence prints, and how to treat overlaid prints. The photographs accompanying these discussions are highly illustrative and the text makes it easy to follow the problems demonstrated by the photographs. These "how-to" sections of the text are innovative and by themselves justify the purchase price of this book.

With respect to quality, in between the "how-to" chapters (which this reviewer would term excellent) and those other chapters previously mentioned (which this reviewer would term well written but nevertheless routine and review), is the chapter dealing with the development of latent prints. This chapter represents an excellent review of the chemical development of prints. Mr. Cowger includes evaluations of the various techniques in his discussions which reinforce the quality ethic apparent in the text. And finally, Mr. Cowger presents a compelling argument that friction ridge identification is a true science. If we define a true science as an orderly body of knowledge with principles that are clearly enunciated, then Mr. Cowger's argument must be acknowledged. There will probably always be some "art" in friction ridge comparisons, just as there is always some art in the way a physician diagnoses a disease state. But the "how-to" chapters of this text convincingly transform much of the art to science by showing the logical underpinnings of the processes involved. It appears to this reviewer that Mr. Cowger has achieved what he set out to do.

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