



# DIVINING FOR THE DEAD

## Exploring A Method of Locating Unmarked Burials

by Robbie Gorr

**S**OON AFTER MY PARENTS WERE MARRIED THEY PURCHASED A LOT OF rural family land on which to build their home and were in need of a well to provide plentiful water. They called upon the services of an elderly neighbour who had a local reputation for finding groundwater with the aid of a witch hazel stick. They dug a well on the location he indicated and it provided fresh water from an underground stream, a water source that has supplied them for over sixty-five years and continues to do so.



Unmarked graves lost to living memory or historical record in any cemetery, graveyard or burial ground might be located by the age-old method of divining. Photo of Grand Canyon Pioneer Cemetery (Photo by Grand Canyon National Park Service, Creative Commons)

Divining is an age-old art and the technique is sometimes known as rhabdomancy. More often referred to as dowsing or witching, and also by the absurd term doodlebugging, it has been used for generations to locate underground water sources, buried treasures, and yes, even the graves of the dead. There are people everywhere, ordinary folk and some who are specialists in their field, who claim to have the power to locate unmarked burials of the dead and even to identify them with regard to gender and approximate age. For genealogists and family historians who have been frustrated by the inability to locate the unrecorded, unmarked or forgotten graves of their ancestors or for those attempting to discover where relatives are buried in a family plot, divining for the dead could be the solution to this problem.

No one, not even those who are experienced and proficient at dowsing, can satisfactorily explain exactly how it works. There are many theories to explain the process, but science has failed to provide a reasonable rationalization. Even the scientific genius of Albert Einstein, a well-known diviner himself, was unable to provide a logical or cogent answer.

### The Necessary Equipment

All might agree that it has something to do with the divining rod, the instrument used by diviners to locate their target. Historically, the tool was almost always Y-shaped so that it could be grasped by



Otto Edler von Graeve (1872-1948), a major in the Prussian army, was a proponent of the divining rod and wrote extensively about its use. (Library of Congress)