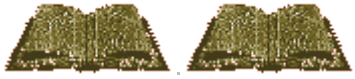
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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section



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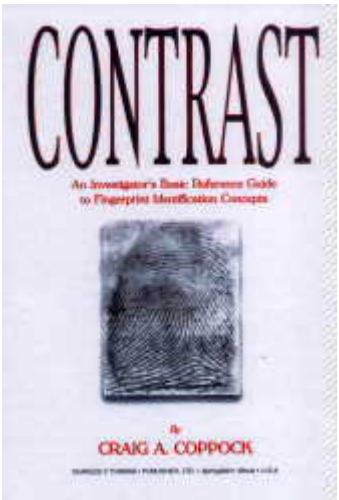
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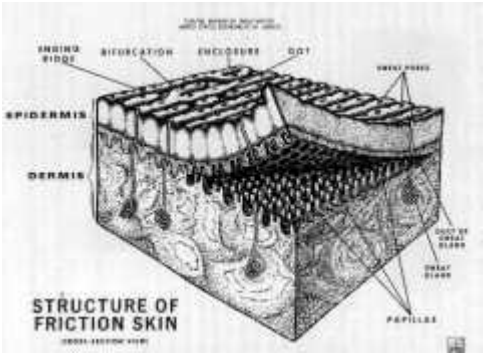


FINGERPRINT IDENTIFICATION CONCEPTS

Contrast: An Investigator's Basic Reference Guide to Fingerprint Identification Concepts, 1st Edition, *by* Craig A. Coppock. Hard Bound, 7" x 10".
Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 2600 South First Street, Springfield, Illinois 62794-9265. Publication Date 2001. xvi + 131 pages, ISBN 0-398-07130-6 (cloth): 0-398-07131-4 (paper). Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 00-061531. Price $35.95 (hard), $22.95 (paper)



The book illustrates basic concepts with well-illustrated diagrams. Here the structure of Friction skin is explained with this diagram. This diagram appears on page 13 of the book

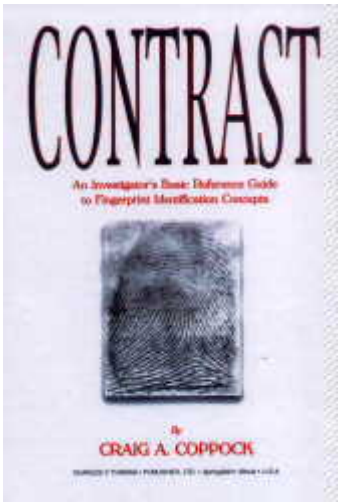


Fingerprints are the surest means of identification. So reliable and foolproof are they, that Henry Faulds (1843-1930), one of the founders of the science of dactylography, commenting on the famous story "The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" by Robert Louis Stevenson, commented thus, "Jekyll's finger patterns remain the same when he transforms himself into Hyde"! By stating this, he was stressing that despite a complete change in appearance, the person could still be caught by the science of dactylography.

The book under review deals with fingerprints in all its aspects. In this book, we find a brief history of fingerprinting, their classification, information about latent fingerprints, information about how to lift fingerprinting and so on. The book differs from routine text books on fingerprinting in the sense that it gives latest technology that has been incorporated in fingerprinting case work.

In fact so important has been fingerprinting that even newer identification techniques have - consciously or subconsciously - incorporated this word. Take for example DNA profiling, discovered by Alec Jeffreys in 1984. It is also a sure means of identification, but general public, and in fact many specialists too, know this science more by the name of DNA Fingerprinting than by DNA profiling. Of course there is no fingerprinting involved in DNA profiling, but when someone refers to DNA fingerprinting, the implication is that DNA profiling is as foolproof as fingerprinting. Thus fingerprinting, in a way, has set a gold standard, against which all newer techniques of identification are measured. Alec Jeffreys himself once said, "If we had called this 'idiosyncratic Southern blot profiling', nobody would have taken a blind bit of notice. Call it 'DNA fingerprinting,' and the penny dropped."

Publisher's Blurb



This guidebook illustrates the basic concepts involved in the science of fingerprints and fingerprint identification. It clarifies many of the oversimplified generalities that pervade the science of fingerprint identification and highlights the many possibilities and limitations of fingerprint identification.

Chapters are arranged logically to facilitate greater knowledge and skills. Major topics include: fingerprints in context; friction skin, friction skin classification; exemplar fingerprint impressions; latent fingerprint development and recovery; special development processes and conditions; latent fingerprint quality variations; fingerprint identification; fingerprint fabrication, errors, and evidence; photography, image enhancement, and color; and computerized fingerprint databases.

The chapters are liberally illustrated to aid the reader. The book is designed to be read in its entirety or to be referenced as a guidebook, as many concepts and information are repeated and cross referenced. The information helps the reader to understand the relationships, benefits, and limitations of crime scene fingerprint evidence.

Contrast is intended for new and experienced crime scene investigators, patrol officers, attorneys, and criminal justice students who seek to add fingerprint identification to their investigative skills.

Fingerprinting is so important that today it is employed at crime scenes, for jail inmate identification, job applicant criminal background checks, immigration identification, criminal record verification, and routine identification for the public. In this very journal we have published several papers on fingerprinting, two of which have bagged the best paper awards. The first was on Poroscopy which appeared in the inaugural issue. The second was a general overview on fingerprinting. Both these papers proved very popular among the readers of this journal.

This is yet another good example where the author makes good use of diagrams. Friction skin characteristics are explained here. *Top row from left to right*: Ending ridge, Bifurcation, dot; *Middle row*: Enclosure or Lake, Trifurcation, Short ridge or island; *Bottom row*: Right angle intersection, bridge, spur (from page 18-19 of the book).







The title of the book (*Contrast*) may confound some. It might be useful to recall that contrast is the key to development of latent print impressions. Whether the development of the latent print is by a fine powder substance, chemical reaction, or by an alternate light source (forensic light), the result is the same. Contrast is increased between the latent print impression and the background on which it resides.

The book is written in fairly simple language. While going through the book, I realized that the author has stressed on basic concepts to make it more useful to beginners. Of course there is ample material for the experts too. What are fingerprints? What is friction skin? What are basic fingerprint pattern types? What are common friction skin characteristics? Information on subjects like these makes the book very useful to beginners. On the other hand, some fairly advanced experts may find useful information in this book too. What is the live scan technology? How are fingerprints fabricated, and how can they be detected? How to present your case best in a court of law? Questions like these would be very much welcomed by experts.

The book is well-illustrated (it has a total of 64 figures). The figures serve to aid the text. I have tried to give some examples where the author has made very good use of diagrams. Three informative appendices round off the book very well.

This book should be welcomed by all fingerprint experts. I would heartily recommend it to all forensic scientists, especially those involved in the practice of dactylography.

Order *Charles C. Thomas* Books by clicking here.

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