

ACTIVITY: Dry-shelling
CASE: **GSFAF 1923.11.23**
DATE: Friday November 23, 1923
LOCATION: The accident took place at Condon, Western Australia.
20°02'S

NAMES: Dea Opre and Selim
DESCRIPTION: Koepang Islanders

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, November 23, 1923

ENVIRONMENT: From 1862 to mid 1868 local aborigines were coerced, without pay, into 'dry shelling' for *Pinctada albina*, small bivalves that yielded commercial amounts of ~3mm, often irregularly shaped, yellowish pearls. Readily accessible shells were soon depleted and 'dry shellers' were forced to wade up to their armpits into deeper waters in their search for shell. Within three years, harvesting of pearl shell moved into waters up to two kilometres offshore – with six to eight aboriginal men and women being used to 'naked dive' for shell from larger boats. As the early pearling beds became exhausted, pearlers and shell-gatherers moved progressively northwards towards Roebuck Bay, where present-day Broome is located.

TIME: Evening

NARRATIVE: The men disappeared while dry-shelling, and were thought to have been taken by sharks.

INJURY: Fatal. Half of Selim's body of one was recovered, but there was no trace of Dea Opre.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified

SOURCES: The Examiner (Launceston, Tasmania, November 28, 1923, page 5
Western Mail, November 29, 1923, page 28
Western Argus (Kalgoorlie), December 4, 1923, page 12
Victor M. Copleson (1958), page 241
Gilbert P. Whitley (1940), page 260
Gilbert P. Whitley (1951), page 185



North-West Tragedy.—A double tragedy, for which sharks are believed to be responsible, has been reported to the police from Condon, on the North-West coast. Joseph Knowles, a master pearler, informed Inspector Spedding-Smith, of Broome, on Saturday that Dea Opre and Selim, Koepang Islanders, had set out on a "dry shelling" expedition on Friday evening. Next morning the mutilated body of Selim was found, but there was no trace of Dea Opre. Selim was a member of the crew of a lugger owned by one McNee, and Dea Opre was employed in a similar capacity by Knowles.

Western Mail, November 29, 1923

Attacked by Sharks

TWO ISLANDERS MISSING.

PERTH, Tuesday.

The Condon police report that two Koepang islanders, who went out dryshelling on Friday evening, are supposed to have been attacked by sharks. Half the body of one was found the next morning, but the other man is missing.