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## Br.Ant.Territory : The Inquest of Kirsty Brown

Submitted by ([Juanita Brock](#)) 14.11.2003 (Article Archived on 28.11.2003)

**The inquest into the tragic death of Antarctic Scientist, Kirsty Brown, was held in Stanley Coroner's Court this afternoon. Sue Gyford from FIBS reports.**

### THE INQUEST OF KIRSTY BROWN:

#### A Report for FIBS By Sue Gyford

Antarctic Scientist, Kirsty Brown, was mauled by a 4 metre long Leopard Seal, which caused 45 separate injuries, the Coroner's Court heard today. The reports read to the Court, witness John Withers, described the seal head area larger than Kirsty's entire head and upper torso.

Mr. Withers was part of a team of four researchers taking part in an underwater survey at South Cove near Rothera on July 22<sup>nd</sup> this year. Two of them, including 28 year old Kirsty, were snorkelling. And the other, Richard Burt, was 15 metres away from her when the team heard a scream from Kirsty and she disappeared beneath the water. Mr. Withers said he saw Kirsty re-surface briefly and then saw her under water being held by a flipper. A boat was launched and Mr. Withers said that after boarding it, he had seen the seal with Kirsty's head in its mouth and apparently playing.

When the seal dropped Kirsty, she was retrieved around 300 metres from the shore but despite repeated resuscitation attempts by colleagues, and Dr. Jane Nash, she could not be revived. Her dive computer later showed that she had been held under water for around six minutes at a depth of up to 70 metres. Home Office Pathologist, Professor Guy Ruttle, described in his report there were 45 bite marks and bruises which resulted from the attack, concentrated mostly around her head. As she was snorkelling, she may have seen the seal coming toward her.

He also described how he had borrowed a Leopard Seal skull from the Museum to help him identify the bite marks as he carried out Kirsty's autopsy.

A report was read from seal expert Professor Ian Boyd from St. Andrews University. He said the Leopard Seal may have mistaken Kirsty for a Fur Seal, or may have been frightened by her presence and made a defensive attack. He said Leopard Seal attacks on humans were virtually unheard of but warned that the increasing human presence in Antarctica could see them becoming more common.

Coroner, Nick Sanders, offered condolences to Kirsty's family, friends and colleagues and paid particular tribute to those who tried to save her.

He recorded a verdict of accidental death caused by drowning and Leopard Seal attack.

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