

Fishermen killed by Stone Age tribe on remote island



Death site: Sentinelese tribesmen climb over the fishermen's boat



Keep away: Angry tribesmen prepare to fire arrows at a hovering Indian Coast Guard helicopter

TWO fishermen have been killed by one of the world's last Stone Age tribes after drifting onto their desert island.

Their bodies may never be recovered from their crude beach graves - because modern man has no safe way of reaching them.

The near-naked tribe which murdered the men have unleashed a volley of arrows and spears at helicopters which have hovered over the burial site on North Sentinel Island, a tiny speck in the Indian Ocean.

Government officials, anthropologists and fishermen have failed for decades to set foot on the island, where the Sentinelese tribe - believed to number between 50 and 200 - are determined to live their primitive lives without interference from the outside world.

Even when rescuers in helicopters and boats approached the island after the 2004 tsunami to check on any casualties, they were met with arrows and spears and were forced to turn away.

So when fishermen Sunder Raj, 48, and Pandit Tiwari, 32, slumped into what is believed to have been a drunken stupor as their boat drifted towards the remote island, their fate was sealed.

When their vessel ran aground,

By Richard Shears

the tribesmen rushed at it and killed the two men with spears, crude axes and clubs.

The scene would not have been so very different from the time, tens of thousands of years ago, when groups of primitive people made their way out of Africa by land and basic sea craft towards South East Asia, battling enemy tribes on the way.

According to other fishermen who were with Raj and Tiwari among a small fleet of boats, the two men dropped anchor, using a

'Drunken stupor'

rock tied to a rope. Then they began a drinking session with home-made alcohol and fell into a deep sleep.

But the rope slipped off the rock and the open boat began to drift towards the island where no man dare set foot.

'As dawn came, the other fishermen tried to shout a warning to the men, to wake them up, warn them of the danger and get their boat away from there,' said Samir Acharya, head of an Indian conservation group.

'But their shouts were in vain.

They just couldn't wake the men up and their boat drifted up onto the beach. That was it - they were over-run by the tribespeople and killed'.

Families of the pair, who live in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, were told of their probable fate by fellow fishermen and a recovery effort was mounted by the Indian coastguard.

But when the tribesmen ran onto the beach and aimed their arrows at the coastguard helicopter, it was decided that it was not safe to land a crew to recover the victims.

Their bodies, however, were exposed in their shallow graves when the down-draught from the chopper's rotor blades blew away the top layer of sand.

The helicopter crew were able to take photographs of the men's boat with the tribesmen clampering over it.

They also photographed the warriors on the beach aiming their arrows at the helicopter.

At first it was thought the fishermen's bodies had been roasted and eaten, but this was a mistaken belief based on the now-extinct practice of another tribe, the Orng, who would burn their dead to prevent them returning as evil spirits.

The Andaman Islands police chief, Dharmendra Kumar, said he could not comment on whether a new attempt would be

made to collect the bodies. 'There would be casualties on both sides,' he said. 'The tribesmen are out in large numbers and we'll just let things cool down.'

'If the tribesmen go inland we might be able to sneak back there and col-

lect the bodies.' The ancient tribespeople escaped the tsunami by moving further inland before it struck.

How they knew the tidal wave was coming is a mystery that has not been answered - because no one can get to them to find out.