

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1934.12.31.a

DATE: Monday December 31, 1934

LOCATION: George's River at Moorebank, near Milperra Bridge, New South Wales, Australia.

33°57'S, 150°E

NAME: Richard George Soden

DESCRIPTION: He was a 19-year-old male from Canberra.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It had been clear earlier in the day, but during the afternoon the sky became overcast and it was rained. The air temperature was 84°F.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, December 29, 1934

SEA CONDITIONS: The water temperature 71°F.

ENVIRONMENT: The accident site, a popular bathing area, was more than 30 kilometres from the mouth of the river and the distance between its banks was about 45 metres. Shoals of fish were seen in the area that morning.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 20 metres.

TIME: 16h30

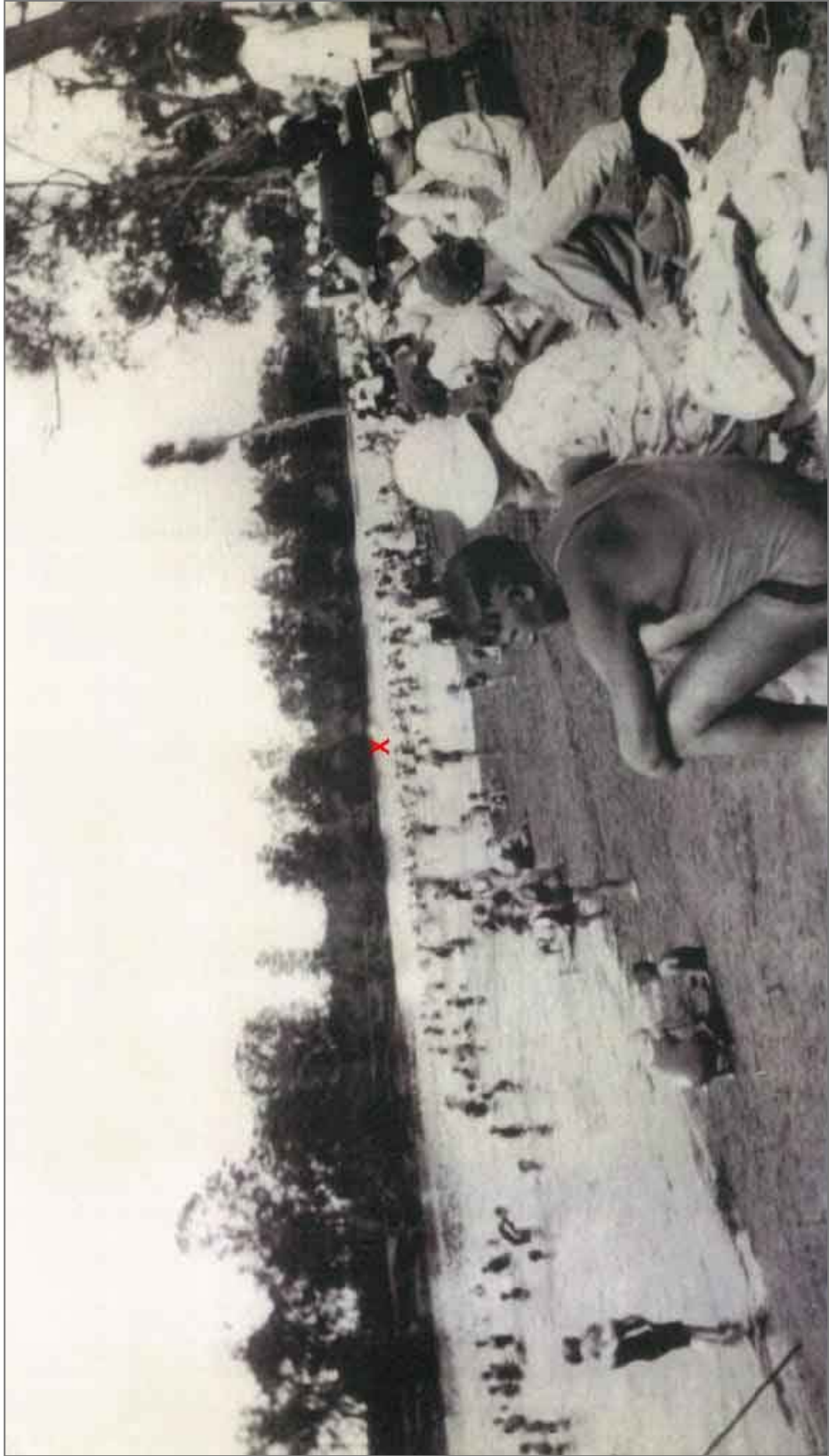
NARRATIVE: Richard George Soden was spending Christmas with his foster parents at their home in Moorebank, Sydney. Late in the afternoon, Soden and two other men were swimming when they decided to race each other across the river. Soden was leading when the dorsal fin of a shark was seen near him. Soden screamed, a huge tail thrashed the water, and the boy disappeared. Moments later he surfaced and swam feebly toward the bank. Two fisherman jumped into the water and waded into the channel and pulled him ashore.

INJURY: Fatal. The wound in his left leg was so severe that he died as he was brought ashore.

SPECIES INVOLVED: A large shark was seen cruising in the shallows along the riverbank two hours later.

SOURCES: The Canberra Times, Tuesday January 1, 1935, page 1; Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 67 & 233; Coppleson Archives, 1223/11 Item 3; Shark Attacks New South Wales, Alan Sharpe, pages 89-90





The red X marks the spot where it was believed that Soden was taken.

SHARK TRAGEDY

CANBERRA BOY'S DEATH

Attacked in George's River

GIRL MAULED AND MAY NOT LIVE

SYDNEY, Monday.

Mauled by a shark while swimming across the George's River at Milperra, Richard George Foden, who lives with his foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, of Westridge, Canberra, died of terrible injuries.

The flesh was torn from his right leg from the knee to the thigh, and he died in the arms of fishermen who waded in to help him out of the water.

Later on, at Kentucky, three miles further up the river, Beryl Gladys Morris, 13, of Bass Hill, was attacked, apparently by the same monster, and is not expected to recover.

Richard Foden, who was staying with his foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, entered the river at about 4.30 p.m. to race two companions, his foster brother, Peter Lawrence, of Moorebank, and Ernest Edwards, of Chipping Norton, across the river, a distance of about 50 yards.

Foden quickly took the lead and when about 30 yards across he was seized by a shark. He shouted to the others as the monster attacked him, and although terribly mauled he struck out for the shore on freeing himself from the shark.

Meanwhile, the onlookers had commenced to wade in towards him, and when he was near the sandbank, they grabbed him to carry him ashore, but he died in their arms.

Some of his rescuers were unable to believe that he was dead, and tore up their shirts to bandage his leg, but his injuries were so terrible that he must have lost a tremendous amount of blood, and it was remarkable that he was able to swim after the attack.

The body was taken across the river in a rowing boat and conveyed to the Liverpool Hospital, where life was formally pronounced to be extinct.

The shark was a grey nurse about 12 feet in length and had been seen by fishermen earlier in the day. Several groups of swimmers had been warned not to enter the river.

"GAMEST BOY I EVER SAW"

George Markham, a fisherman, who was an eye witness of the tragedy said that he saw three boys enter the water to race across the river.

"Foden was about ten yards ahead of the others," said Markham, "when I saw the black fin of a shark a few yards away from him. Powerless to move, I saw the shark turn and rush at him. Lawrence shouted 'shark' to the others and the monster struck at him, and the water was immediately tinged with blood.

"I reached him first," continued Markham. "He must have lost a terrible amount of blood and I do not know how he was ever able to swim. He was the gamest boy I have ever seen."

"When I grabbed him, his hand seemed suddenly to go limp in mine. I carried him out of the water but he died in my arms."

Another fisherman stated that he had been fishing all day and had not caught a fish, until a companion had pointed out the shark swimming in shallow water as the cause.

A further shark horror occurred later at Kentucky. News of the tragedy had not reached there when at eight o'clock, Mrs. Morris let her five children go in for a swim. She sat on the bank watching them and heard Beryl call for help. Thinking for a moment that she was only playing, she did not move; but a few moments later she was horrified to see her daughter standing in about four feet of water, hold up the stumps of her arms and cry out: "It's got me."

Joe Schoefield dashed into the water and brought the girl to the shore, while the other children scrambled out of the water. After making its first attack the shark did not return.

The girl was rushed to the Canterbury District Hospital in a serious con-

SHARK TRAGEDY

Death Of Canberra Youth

EVIDENCE AT INQUEST

SYDNEY, Thursday.

"I saw the shark cleaving the water close to Soden. I yelled 'shark.' The water became streaked with blood as Soden swam for the shore. I waded up to my middle and pulled him to safety." Thus George Markham, a fisherman, described the tragedy in George's River on December 31 last, in with Richard Soden, 20, was fatally mauled by a shark, when the inquest into the youth's death was conducted by the Liverpool coroner, Mr. Pollman, to-day.

Markham said that the whole of Soden's right side was eaten off. He put the lad in a boat, and brought him across the river. The shark was between 12 and 14 feet long. He had seen it earlier in the day cruising up and down the river.

Peter Lawrence said that he was swimming with Soden, who was generally known as Lawrence, when the attack occurred. He said that they were having a final swim before going home, when he heard the cry of "shark!" He then saw a lot of blood. Lawrence said only 20 minutes elapsed between the time Soden was brought ashore and admitted to hospital.

The coroner returned a verdict of accidental death.

The Canberra Times
Friday January 25, 1935, page 1

GRAND BENEFIT DANCE

ALBERT HALL
FRIDAY, MARCH 29

For erection of Headstone over the late Dick Lawrence, who was fatally mauled by a shark at Milperra Beach 31/12/34.

Pogson's Orchestra.

Mr. Maddigan, M.C. Good Supper.
E. E. THOMAS, Promoter.

The Canberra Times
Wednesday March 27, 1935, page 5