

ACTIVITY: Splashing
CASE: **GSFAF 1962.01.27**
DATE: Saturday January 27, 1962
LOCATION: The incident took place at Oreti Beach, South Island, New Zealand.



NAME: Norman McEwan
DESCRIPTION: An 18-year-old male, a Pay Clerk working for Lands and Survey (Government Department). He was wearing boxer shorts, had bare feet, and was not wearing any jewelry.

BACKGROUND:

WEATHER: It was hot day, sunny and bright.
MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, January 29, 1962
SEA CONDITIONS: "Mid-tide, going out."
ENVIRONMENT: The beach was sandy, flat, without rocks or pier, and deserted. Nobody was fishing and there was no unusual bird or fish activity.
DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 1.5 metres
DEPTH OF WATER: Waist-deep
TIME: Late afternoon, about 16h00 [4 p.m.]

NARRATIVE: Norman McEwan and his friends had been to some local car races, and subsequently decided to go for a swim. It appears this was a "spur of the moment" kind of thing, and "spirits were high" after the races. They were the only people on the beach. Mrs McEwan's father was a fisherman and, knowing a little about the sea, opted to remain on the beach whilst a group of six entered the water. The group of six were not swimming, but rather standing/splashing about. Somebody then saw the shark amongst the group, as a shadow under the surface. Mr McEwan (preparing to leave the water) felt something brush his leg. As he lifted his hand from the water it was dripping with blood. The group of six left the water. Mr McEwan did not strike the shark in any way, and nobody else interacted with it. No fin was sighted, and once the group had left the water the shark was not seen again.

INJURY: Mr McEwan's injury was light because he was in the process of pulling his hand from the water as the shark went to bite him, and Mrs McEwan supports the fact that the shark never fully closed its jaws around the hand. The injury consisted of tooth marks on the palm and a gash across the back of the (left) hand. Mr McEwan has a slight scar today, and suffered no psychological effects from the incident.

TREATMENT: Mr McEwan was taken to Kew Hospital (now Southland Hospital) in Invercargill. The injury did not require stitches. No tooth fragments were recovered from the wound.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Coppleson and Baldrige recorded the length of the sharks as 1.5 metres [5']. Mrs. McEwan said the shark was about a metre in length, "not huge". She had "no idea" as to the species of shark involved, nor could she offer an explanation as to why the shark bit her husband.

COMMENTS: Mrs McEwan also told me that the incident appeared in the Reader's Digest, and at the time was the world's most southerly attack.

The group's activity in the water (post the excitement of the car racing) was of a "frolicking" type nature, and it is likely that the shark was attracted by the splashing.

I asked whether her husband now held any fear of sharks. She said no, and recounted two incidents after the incident in support of her statements. The first occurred at Hahei Beach, Coromandel, North Island, when their son, Paul, was in a rowing boat. Her husband went to see if he was safe. Looking down in waist-deep water he saw a shark, which then followed him to the sand. Mr McEwan dragged it out by the tail. It was a mako shark, and of a small size. Secondly, whilst on holiday in Malaysia, Mr McEwan snorkeled with blacktip sharks. However, the couple has never returned to Oreti Beach....*Richard D. Weeks.*

SOURCES: Personal Interview with Mrs. McEwan by Richard D. Weeks on January 11, 2005; Victor M. Coppleson (1962), page 247; David Baldrige, page 16.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Richard D. Weeks, Global Shark Accident File

SHARK SCARE AT ORETI BEACH

Youth gets wrist gash in attack

Southland's only major shark scare of recent years occurred on Saturday afternoon at Oreti Beach when a young man with blood dripping from a gash on his wrist and hand waded from the water and announced that he had been attacked by a five-foot shark.

He was 18-year-old Norman McEwan, an Invercargill Lands and Survey Department employee and he had been swimming in water only waist deep with two other friends when the shark seized his wrist.

"I didn't even see it until it grabbed me," said Norman this morning. "I yanked my hand away pretty fast and the shark just curved away while I started back for the shore."

"I didn't go too fast because I'd heard that if you caused a commotion a shark is likely to attack again, but I was mighty pleased to get out of the water," said Norman.

YELLED WARNING

One of the other swimmers with Norman is reported to have seen the shark but thought it to be someone swimming under water. He was yelling a warning as it rolled on its back and struck.

When the alarm was given it was not long before all swimmers at the beach were out of the water, and although all eyes scanned the surf there was no further sign of the shark.

Mr Gordon White, curator of the Southland Museum, said that a shark although greatly attracted by blood is generally believed to be a cowardly creature and will not attack unless the chances of getting away are pretty good.

"This one was most probably frightened off by the sudden movement and the boy wading fairly swiftly through the water," said Mr White.

Mr White thought that there was a possibility that the attacker was a dog fish which grow to the reported five foot length, or a tope (sand shark).



ABOVE: Norman McEwan, 18, a Lands and Survey employee who was attacked by a shark at Oreti Beach at about 3 p.m. on Saturday. BELOW: The small but deep gashes on his wrist where the shark grabbed him. There were other tooth marks on the back of his hand.



Southland Daily News
January 29, 1962