

ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE [GSAF 1981.05.10 / SA-295](#)

DATE: Sunday May 10, 1981

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean at Kings Beach, Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.



NAME: John Dunser

DESCRIPTION: A 19-year-old male.

SURFBOARD: The surfer was using a 2,7-metre twinfin board. The under-surface of the board was striped (navy, yellow, green, white and red), and had two red fins.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: Temperature ranged from 14,8° to 21°C (58.6° to 70°F) and, although it remained partly cloudy during the morning, the sky had cleared somewhat by late afternoon.

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was green with 1,8-metre visibility, and it was mean low tide. Wave height was two metres and sea temperature was 17°C (62.6°F).

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: .The incident took place at a spot known locally as The Fence; it is 150-200 metres (165-220 yards) from the harbour wall.

DEPTH OF WATER: 2,7 metres.

TIME: 14h35

NARRATIVE: Four other surfers were in the water when the incident took place. Dunser was lying on his board, his lower legs protruding over the edge of the board as he waited for a wave. Suddenly his foot was pushed upwards and sideways, and the rear of his board was bumped. Looking down, he saw a shark swimming below him. He described the shark as dark-coloured, about two to 2,5 metres in length and very wide-bodied, and noticed that its dorsal fin was large, slightly pointed and thick in cross-section. The shark swam in tight circles below the board, bumping it four times and then continued to circle for about three minutes. The shark disappeared when another surfer approached Dunser and paddled alongside him to the shore.

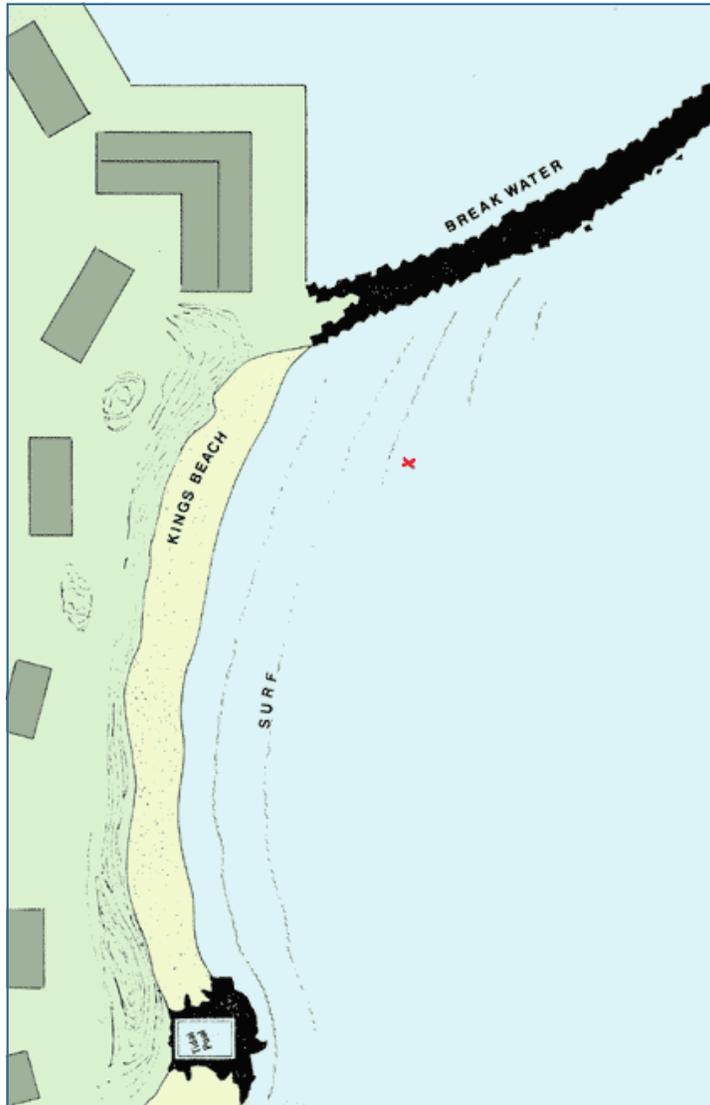
INJURY: The surfer was not injured.

DAMAGE TO SURFBOARD: Six puncture marks and a depression were visible in his surfboard: punctures one, two and three were angled at about 45°; punctures four and five were vertical and puncture six was at about a 60° angle; punctures 1,5 and six continued into the surfboard's rails. The spacing, position, angle and shape of the tooth marks, suggest that either a raggedtooth shark or a mako shark could be responsible.

SPECIES: The shallow water, direction and force of thrust, the pattern of the bite and tooth impressions on the surfboard together with the behaviour of the shark suggested that a raggedtooth shark about two metres in length was involved in the incident.

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CASE INVESTIGATOR: Malcolm Smale, Ph.D., Port Elizabeth Museum



Surfer's

brush
with
big
shark

11 MAY 1981

NATAL NEWS

Mercury Correspondent
PORT ELIZABETH - A shark bit a chunk out of a surfer's board 200 m off Kings Beach here yesterday afternoon.

John Dunser, 19 Technikon student, described his moments of terror as the 2 m shark circled and bumped his board before biting it.

Mr Dunser was waiting for waves in a choppy sea with four other surfers at 'The Fence' when he felt his board bumped.

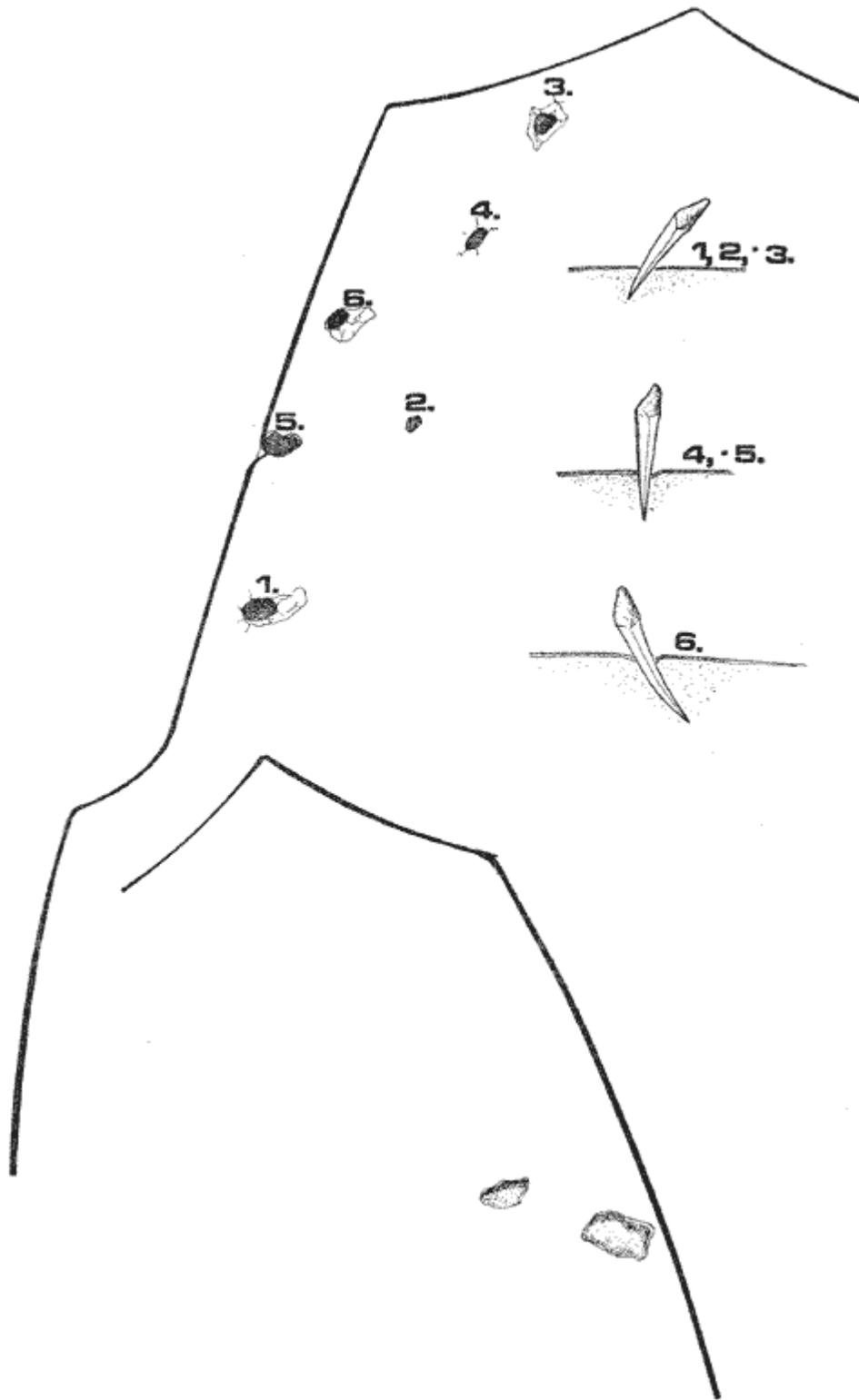
'Actually, I froze on the board. The shark was just under me, circling and bumping me all the time.

'It just missed my leg,' he said, adding that he had followed the text-book advice of keeping calm while the shark circled.

Eventually one of the other surfers told him to paddle out, following him on his own board.

Afterwards Mr Dunser went to the oceanarium where a marine biologist, Dr Graham Ross, inspected the toothmarks on the rear left end of the board.

'As far as I can make out, it was a shark,' said Dr Ross. 'It was probably a ragged-tooth shark, which operates in shallow waters'.





These are the marks left on the tail end of Dunser's board (25 cm wide x 33 cm deep)



The chunk that was bitten from the edge of the board (25 cm wide x 33 cm deep)

Photos by Colin Urquhart