

ACTIVITY: Scuba diving

CASE: **GSF 1992.11.11**

DATE: Wednesday November 11, 1992

LOCATION: The incident took place the Pacific Ocean at San Nicholas Island, Santa Barbara County, California, USA.

33°13.6'N; 119°32.3'W

NAME: Kenny Crane

DESCRIPTION: He is a commercial diver, and was dressed in a multi-colored wetsuit with face mask, swim fins, scuba tank and regulator.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was clear and the air temperature was 27°C.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, 99% of the Moon's visible disk was illuminated.

SEA CONDITIONS: The surface water temperature was 19°C (recorded), and the swells were two metres and higher. Underwater visibility was in excess of 30 metres.

ENVIRONMENT: San Nicolas Island, approximately nine miles long and four miles wide, lies in the Santa Barbara Channel 75 miles west of Los Angeles. The seafloor at the incident site was primarily rock with some short kelp plants and many red sea urchins, *Strongylocentrotus franciscanus*. A lone harbor seal was the only pinniped seen by the diver during the 30 minutes he was submerged prior to the incident.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 300 to 400 metres, adjacent to a drop-off to a second shelf in 20 fathoms of water.

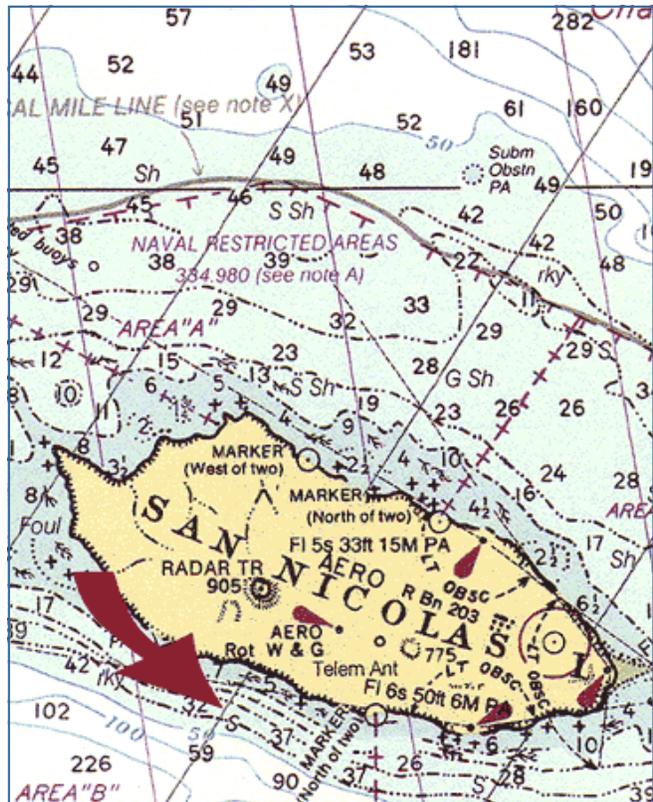
DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: 12 fathoms

TIME: 14h00

NARRATIVE: While scouting the bottom, Kenny Crane noticed a large spiny lobster wedged in a cave. Crane reached in and began pulling to remove the animal from its den. His head was down and his feet were pointed toward the surface. Something grabbed hold of his right swim fin, shaking it violently for several seconds. The fin was removed as Crane turned quickly to see an unidentifiable shark swimming away and his fin sinking out of sight.

Earlier in his dive, Crane had observed a large thresher shark and a soupfin shark, *Galeorhinus galeus*, cruising the area. Occasionally these sharks would take turns swimming quickly toward the diver before veering off at a distance of five to 10 metres. Crane believed the sharks were trying to drive him away. It appeared to him that the sharks were attempting to frighten him away from the area, rather than to feed.

INJURY: Upon surfacing, the diver found several deep punctures in his foot.



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FIRST AID / TREATMENT: Upon reaching port, the injured diver was admitted to Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara. Emergency room physicians treated the tooth punctures with antiseptic wash and dressed the wounds. Sutures were not necessary, nor was overnight hospitalization. Crane was released and expected to make a full recovery.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The diver did not see the shark that bit him until it was almost 20 metres away from his location and swimming toward deeper water. With the limited information available, positive identification of the species involved in this incident is not possible. However, the behavior of the two sharks, as reported by the diver, suggests that one of them might have been responsible. If, in fact, Crane is correct in his interpretation of the shark's behavior, then this could be the first case of an unprovoked incident involving either a thresher shark or a soupfin shark off the Pacific Coast of the United States.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Ralph Collier