

**ACTIVITY:** Scuba diving

**CASE:** GSAF 2003.02.27

**DATE:** Thursday February 27, 2003

**LOCATION:** The attack took place off the east side Bench Island in the Foveaux Strait. The island is off the northeast coast of Stewart Island which lies 30 kilometres south of New Zealand's South Island. Oban, located on Half Moon Bay, is the only town on Stewart Island.

**NAME:** Alistair John Kerr

**DESCRIPTION:** The diver is a 44-year-old male. He is 5'9" tall and weighs 70 kilograms. He was wearing a yellow mask, black fins, scuba gear and a 5 mm neoprene dry suit with a black bottom and bright blue top. The diver wore no jewelry and had no injuries prior to the incident, and he was not spearfishing. He is a farmer from Outram, 27km west of Dunedin

**SUPPORT BOAT:** A six-metre unpainted aluminum monohull runabout.

#### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** The sky was clear, air temperature was 18°C and there was a light five-knot breeze.

**MOON PHASE:** New Moon, March 3, 2003

**SEA CONDITIONS:** There was a slight chop on the surface, the sea temperature was 17°C and underwater visibility was 20 metres.

**ENVIRONMENT:** It is a rocky area. A warm current from the Australian Great Barrier Reef flows around Stewart Island, bringing clearer warmer water than elsewhere in the South Island. Sharks are common around Stewart Island. No one was fishing in the area, nor was any unusual fish or bird activity observed. However, there were small seals in the area.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 40 metres

**DISTANCE FROM ROCKS:** 15 metres

**DISTANCE FROM BOAT:** 60 metres

**DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE:** 10 metres, but the diver was on the surface when the incident took place.

**TIME:** 11h45

**NARRATIVE:** Alistair John Kerr had been in the water for 10 minutes and was facing seawards. He had had been diving with Mark Butson and was resting on the surface alongside the boat waiting to get out of the water when the shark came at him. "I was on the surface after the dive and for some reason looked down in the water to see a white shark

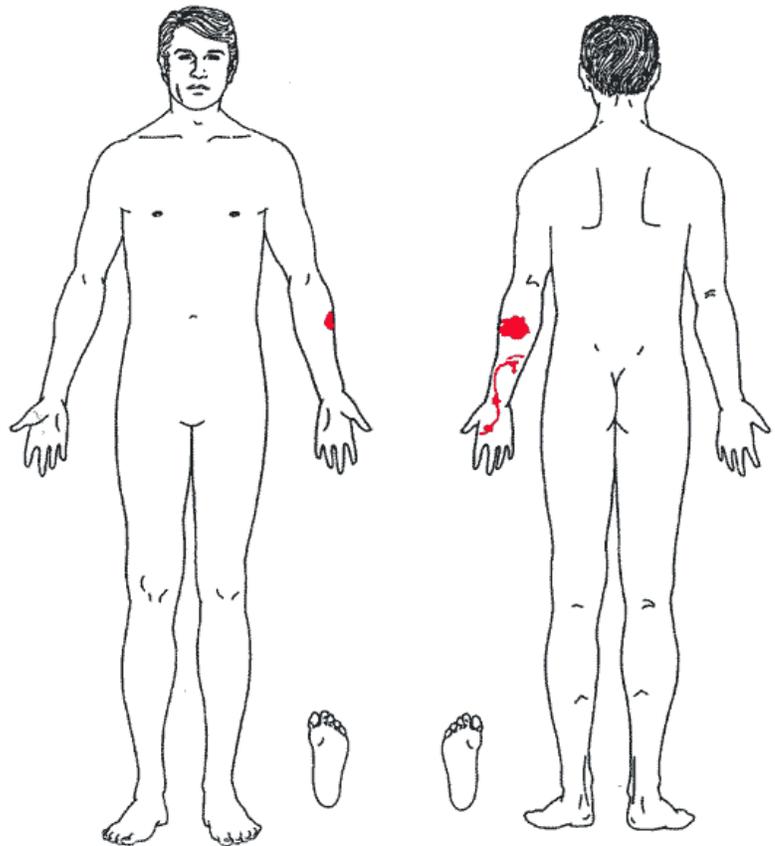


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coming up at me with its mouth open,” said Kerr. “It came up to me and bit my arm twice before my buddy divers came over in the boat to help me.”

**INJURY:** The diver's arm was severely lacerated, and he sustained tendon and nerve damage.

**FIRST AID:** Kerr was hauled on to the dive boat. His drysuit was not removed because it served as a pressure bandage. The diver was taken to Halfmoon Bay on Stewart Island where he was bitten. On Stewart Island, he was treated by the district nurse. Ambulance staff from Invercargill flew to the island and accompanied the diver to Kew Hospital. He was reported to be conscious and in stable condition when he arrived at the hospital. The surgeon was Mr. R. Fowler.



**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The attack involved a white shark about 2.5 metres in length. The initial bite appears to be asocial or exploratory. The second bite was a rapid readjustment of grip rather than a completely separate bite, only the upper teeth change position. The shark gave him a rather slight shake then released him. Most notable is that the shake action didn't result in more serious damage. The shark essentially clamped down and held in a low energy strike.

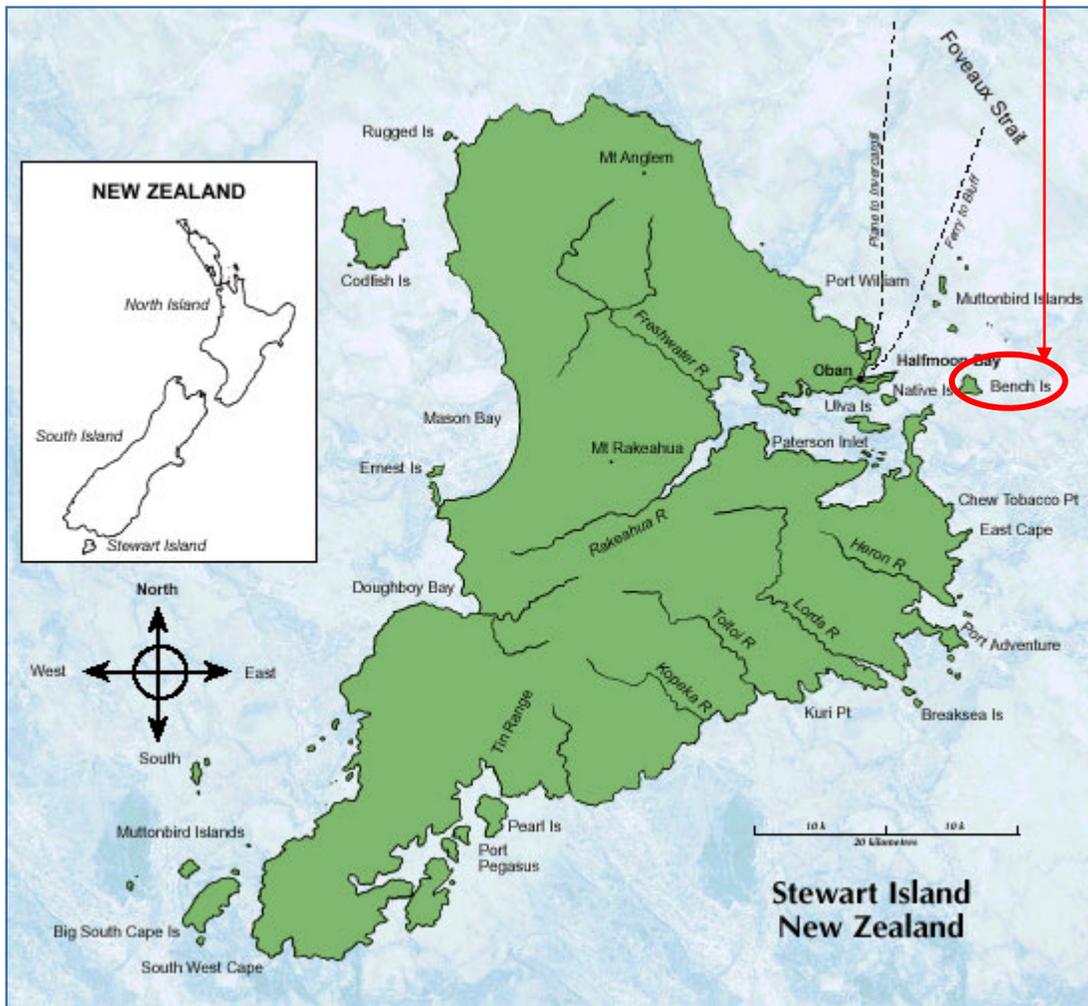
**SOURCES:** Interviews with Alistair Kerr by GSAF investigators; TV1 News, NZ; Otago Daily Times; New Zealand Herald.

**NOTE:** When Alistair was asked if he had any theory as to why the shark went after him, he said that he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. “As a life experience,” he said, “out of 10, I would have to give it 11!”

**CASE INVESTIGATORS:** Richard Weeks and Mark Marks, GSAF

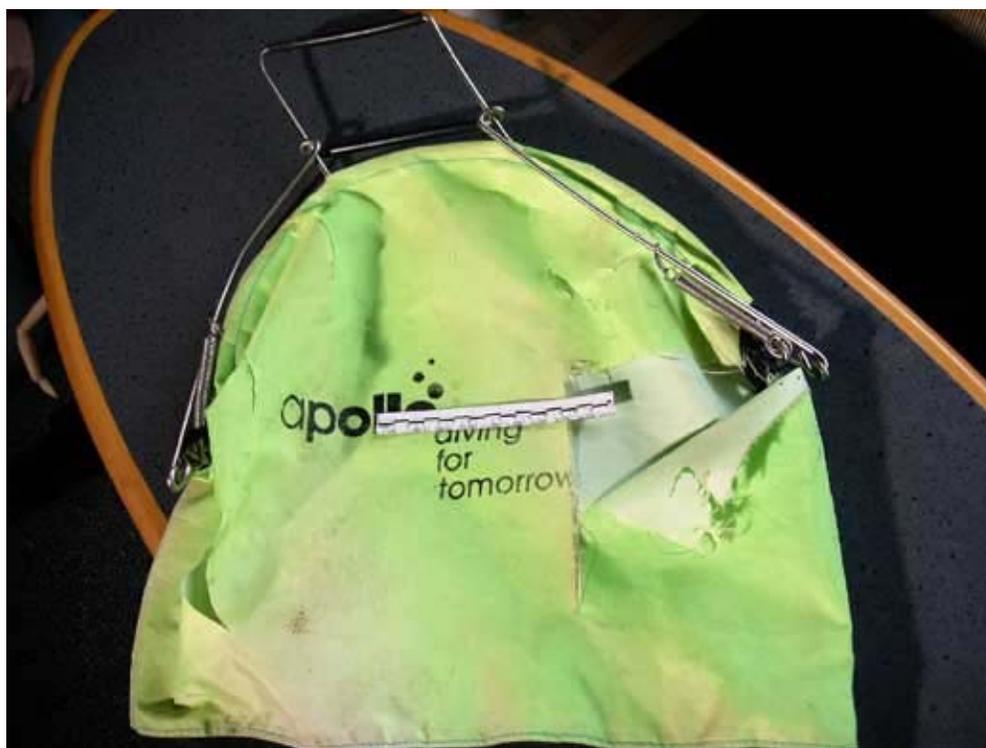


Bench Island





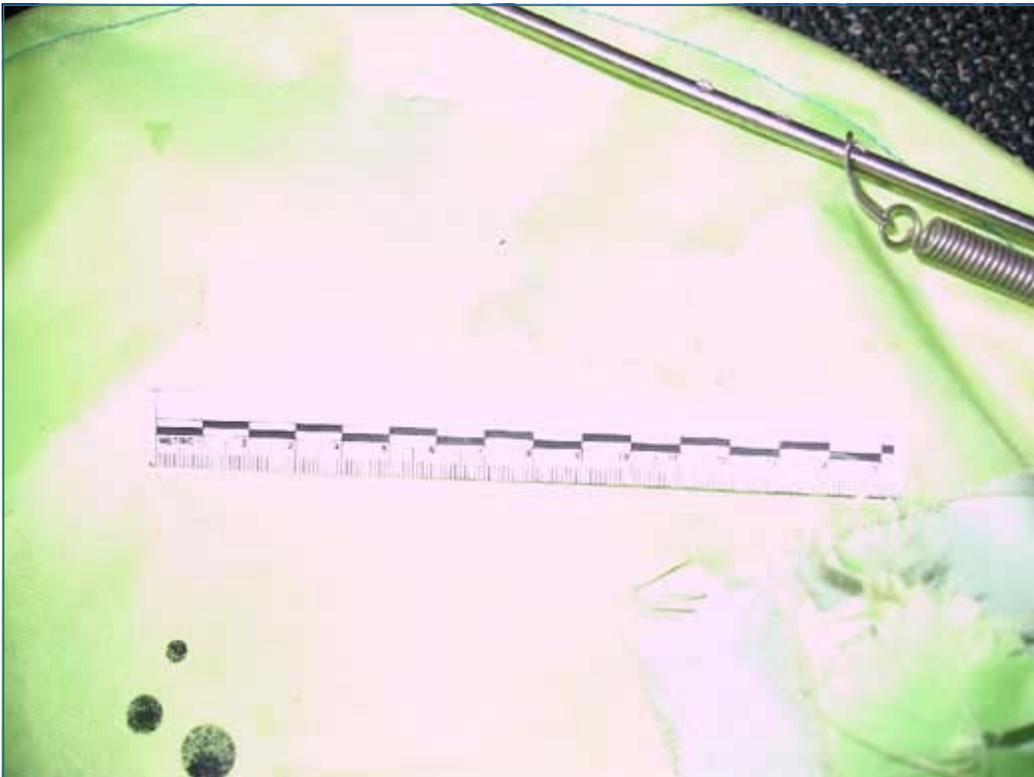
*Alistair Kerr & Mark Marks, Global Shark Accident File*



*Tooth marks of the shark in Alistair Kerr's goody-bag.*



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