

**ACTIVITY:** Surfing

**CASE:** GSAF 2004.07.10

**DATE:** Saturday July 10, 2004

**LOCATION:** The attack took place in the Indian Ocean near the Margaret River, at a break called "Left-Handers" two kilometers south of Gracetown, 250 kilometres south of Perth in Western Australia.

33°52.997'S, 114°58.926'E

**NAME:** Bradley Adrian Smith.

**DESCRIPTION:** The surfer was a 29-year-old male from Shoalwater, south of Perth. He was probably wearing a full wetsuit due to the cool water temperature. Smith's best friend Rod Draper says, "He absolutely loved life, an amazing guy, just a charger in the ocean and everyone that's ever met him, he's the best bloke, he's your best mate from the word go...I don't think there's a person that could ever say a bad word about big Bradley Bear."

**SURFBOARD:** The upper surface is white. The size, type and manufacturer of the board are not known, nor is it known if the surfer was wearing a surfboard leash.



*Brad Smith*

## **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** Light to moderate easterly wind. The average air temperature is 18° to 19°C [64° to 66°F].

**MOON PHASE:** Last Quarter, July 9, 2004

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The average sea temperature is 19°C [66°F] and swells run 8 to 10 feet in height.

**ENVIRONMENT:** White sharks are known to spend time on Western Australia's southern coast during winter before moving north to hunt whales which are returning to southern waters. There had been a number of recent shark sightings along the coast; Margaret River locals say there have been many shark sightings recently. A local surfer said big sharks had been spotted at the Margaret River mouth, Redgate and Gnarabup but none in the vicinity of Left Handers beach. The beach, a popular spot with novices learning to surf, is a long beach, often deserted, lined with a rocky shelf which is pounded by large ocean swells out of the southern Indian Ocean. Surfing beaches along 100 kilometers of the coast, from Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leuwin, were closed after the attack.

**TIME:** 14h10 [2:10 p.m.]

**NARRATIVE:** The tragedy occurred in front of crowds of surfers and holidaymakers. Brad Smith was surfing with a mate and three other people when a large shark snapped his board in half, knocking him into the sea. "Another large shark launched itself out of the water and got him and that was it." said a surfer. Smith lashed out with his fists to try to keep the sharks at bay as they came at him repeatedly.

Surfer Cameron Rowe, a 16-year-old who witnessed the attack, said: "These [sharks] were massive. When the first one came up a bit I could see its fin and it was almost a yard high. When it came out of the water with Brad still fighting it, I could see its body was about the width of a car and its open jaws were as wide as a man's arm. What happened then just

ended up in a terrible feeding frenzy. It was awful.”

One of Smith's friends, 17-year-old Mitch Campbell, said: ‘It was the worst thing I have seen. There was so much confusion out there it was impossible to tell which shark was attacking, but they kept coming at him time and time again. You could see Brad trying to whack at them to keep them away.’”

But after just 45 seconds Smith disappeared beneath the surface. Department of Fisheries spokeswoman Jenny Hodder said: “One shark bit the board and knocked him into the water. The other shark attacked.” Another marine expert, Mike Roennfeldt, said he was surprised at the nature of the ambush-style attack, “Generally sharks are solo hunters,” he said. “It’s unusual – unheard of, in fact – for one Great White to knock a guy off his surfboard and then for another to attack, which seems to have happened here.”

Rowe and Campbell ran over the reef and plunged into the water to assist in pulling Smith to shore.

**INJURY:** Fatal. The surfer suffered extensive injuries to his torso, and a large bite to his leg. He suffered “massive injuries to pelvis and abdomen”, according to a St. Johns Ambulance spokesperson. “We will be giving a report of the investigation to the coroner in Bunbury,” said a police spokesperson.

**DAMAGE TO SURBOARD:** The board was broken in half (see images above).

**FIRST AID:** Surfers helped Smith ashore. An ambulance and medivac helicopter were called but the surfer died from massive blood loss before he could be carried to a car park. Two friends surfing with the Smith at the time were taken to Margaret River Hospital and treated for shock.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** Witnesses told police they saw two sharks. One shark was 4.5 metres in length (possibly a white, bull or bronze whaler shark), and a second shark 3



*From this view it is clear that the board was not bitten; it was broken as if it struck with tremendous force.*

Channel 7 photo

metres in length. According to witnesses, it was the larger shark that bit the man. Considering the location of the attack, the size and behavior of the sharks, it is probable that the attack involved a white shark, and if a second shark was involved it was highly likely that it was the same species. If two white sharks were involved in this incident, it suggests that it may have been a cooperative feeding effort.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Terry Peake, Shark Research Institute



Photo by Eloise Dortch

*Surfers ride the waves at the main break at Margaret River near where Brad Smith was killed.*