

ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE: GSAF 2005.10.19

DATE: Wednesday October 19, 2005

LOCATION: The incident took place at the south end of Salmon Creek Beach, Sonoma County, 65 miles north of San Francisco, California, USA.

38°21.28'N, 123°04.36'W

NAME: Megan Halavais

DESCRIPTION: She is a 20-year-old female from Santa Rosa, an experienced surfer, former Santa Rosa city lifeguard, swimming instructor and Santa Rosa Junior College water polo player. She is 5'9" and was wearing a black wetsuit.



Megan Halavais

SURFBOARD: A white trifin with white fins.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: There was intermittent sunshine with a five mph light breeze from the southeast. At 10h53, nearby Bodega Bay, recorded a mostly cloudy sky, visibility of 10 miles [16.1 kilometers], and wind direction was south at 1.6 mph [7.4 km/h]. The air temperature was 61°F [16.1°C], dew point 50°F [10°C], humidity 67% and sea level pressure was 30.13 inches [1020.3 hPa].

MOON PHASE: Waning Gibbous, 95% of the Moon was illuminated. Full Moon, October 17, 2005. Last Quarter, October 25, 2005.

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was calm with five- to six-foot ground swells and 10-foot underwater visibility. "The water was really glassy, really calm, really clear like you could see straight to the bottom," Halavais said. She describes the water as "warm".

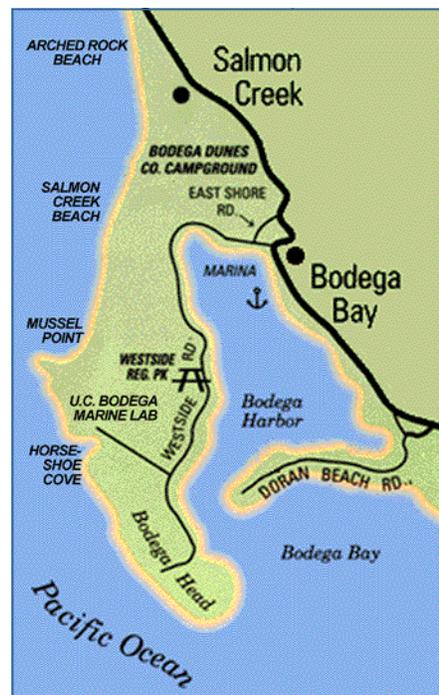
ENVIRONMENT: A lagoon forms as sand closes the mouth of Salmon Creek. Fish spawn in the area during summer months. The ocean floor is sandy with several rocky reefs in the area. No pinnipeds were observed in the water.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 100 yards

DEPTH OF WATER: Eight to 10 feet

TIME: 10h35

NARRATIVE: Megan Halavais, accompanied by her boyfriend John Henry and five other companions, was surfing at Salmon Creek Beach and Mussel Point near Bodega Bay. They had been in the water for about an



The crescent of tooth marks on the bottom of Halavais' surfboard was more than 18 inches in diameter as measured by Lt. Roger Rude of the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department.

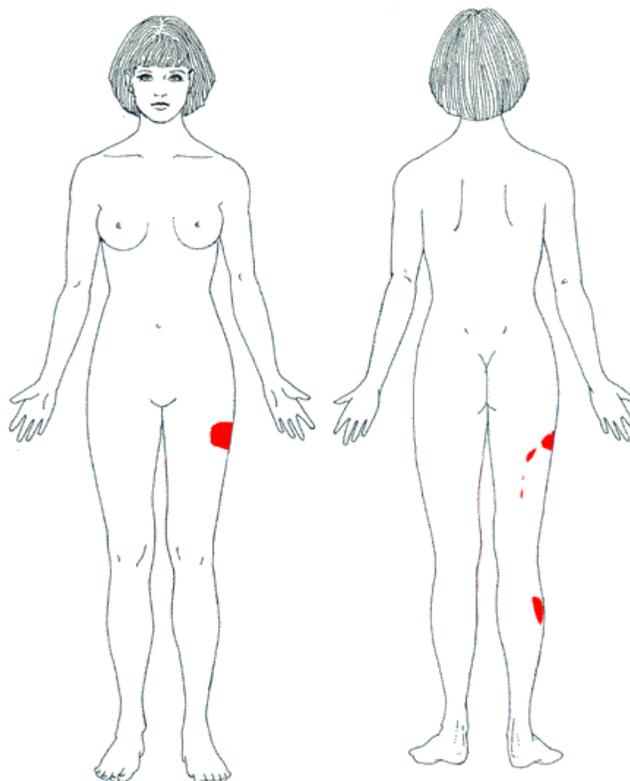


hour. Megan was lying on her surfboard 30 – 40 feet south of the other surfers when the shark approached her from behind. Halavais recalled; “I was facing out to sea and slowly paddling. My friends were north of my location.”

“Suddenly I was struck on my right thigh and driven up out of the water. I looked back over my right shoulder and saw the back and dorsal fin of a large white shark. It released its grip and I fell off the board onto the back of the shark. I used both hands to push off its back as it submerged. It still had hold of my board as the shark rolled on its side and went under the water. I was at the surface and suddenly found myself being pulled below the water. The shark had my leg leash in its mouth and held me under for several seconds before its teeth cut my leash. I popped to the surface and my boyfriend, John Henry, was right next to me. I crawled up onto his board and he paddled over to my board. All of my friends were shouting while I was struggling with the shark.”

Halavais said she didn't realize that the shark had bitten her until she was back on her board and paddling toward shore. She let her limp, right leg hang down into the cold water and tried to breathe easy as her friends urged her on. The surfers grouped together and paddled to shore with Halavais. “We all then paddled to the beach. From start to finish the attack lasted maybe 20 seconds.”

INJURY: The surfer sustained five lacerations to her right leg. The injury extended from her thigh to her calf. The shark bit to the bone. There was a 16-centimeter laceration to the right thigh and a five-centimeter laceration to the lower leg.



FIRST AID: Halavais' friends helped her ashore, and wrapped her bleeding leg with an undershirt, and called 911. “Once I got out of the water, it hurt,” she said, comparing the pain to that of a sore muscle. One of the surfers ran to summon the Bodega Bay Fire Department's paramedics and Halavais was stabilized before she was flown to the hospital by the Sheriff's Helicopter Rescue Unit – Henry One. “It landed on the beach and flew me to Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital,” said Halavais.

TREATMENT: Forty-five minutes elapsed between the time Halavais was bitten and her arrival in the trauma center at the hospital in Santa Rosa. Trauma nurse Jan Gritsch said that Halavais was extremely cold when she arrived at the hospital, and that it was difficult to determine the pulses in her injured leg.

Dr. Dave Hardin, a trauma surgeon who treated Halavais at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital,

says she actually “came very close to losing her leg. We did a special angiogram using a C.A.T. scanner to look at the blood vessels, and the shark bite went all the way down to the bone and came within a centimeter of a major artery.” Hardin said Halavais is expected to make a full recovery, adding that another surgical procedure will be performed on Friday.

SPECIES: The incident involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*. The surfer estimated the shark was about 14 feet in length, however, tooth marks indicate the shark was about 18 feet in length and weighed around two tons. If one were to place an automotive comparison on the shark it would be the equivalent of a Chevy Suburban.

NOTE: The State Parks Department closed a six-mile stretch of the Sonoma Coast from Mussel Point at Bodega Head to Coleman Beach until Oct. 24.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Ralph Collier



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Salmon Creek Beach. Note the lagoon at the mouth of the river.