

ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE: GSAF 2006.03.23

DATE: Thursday March 23, 2006

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean at Left Overs, a popular surf spot about a mile south of Waimea Bay on O'ahu, Hawaii, USA.

NAME: Elizabeth Dunn

DESCRIPTION: She is a 28-year-old female from Vancouver, British Columbia, a psychology professor who has been surfing for two years.

SURFBOARD: She was using a seven-foot board.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: At 09h53, there was a light rain at Lihue and visibility was 10 miles [16.1 km]. The air temperature was 75°F [23.9°C], dew point 69.1°F [20.6°C], humidity 82%, sea level pressure 29.87 inches [1011.3 hPa], and wind direction was South at 6.9 mph [11.1 km/h].

The weather may have been a contributing factor to the incident. John Naughton, a local biologist with NOAA Fisheries, cautioned that the runoff from recent rain could bring sharks closer to shore. He said the runoff brings lots of shark food into the nearshore waters and he is urging people not to go swimming there.

MOON PHASE: Last Quarter, March 22, 2006

SEA CONDITIONS: Dunn said the surf conditions were perfect before the accident. The water, though murky, was glassy with well-formed waves about three feet high. "I was just getting my groove on," she said. According to officials, the water was turbid.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 350 to 400 feet

DEPTH OF WATER: Six feet, estimated

TIME: 11h30

NARRATIVE: Elizabeth Dunn and her partner, Chris Smith, were surfing when she was bitten. Her last ride was long and euphoric, she said. Then she turned her board around to paddle back out.

The first contact was a bump from below, which she said she thought was a turtle. She'd just seen a turtle and the local man she was surfing with had reassured her that he hadn't seen a shark in those waters in five years. Next, she said, she felt the bite on her left calf before she saw a two-foot-tall fin, jagged with ridges. The shark released her leg and swam away. It happened so quickly that she's not sure what kind of shark it was, or how big it was.

"I was totally terrified and there was nothing I could do," Dunn said. When the shark hit and released, she knew she wasn't badly injured but couldn't bring herself to put her hands back into the water to paddle in, so she screamed. Two other surfers were far away and seemed to take forever to hear her, Dunn said, adding that being alone with the perfect wave had its drawbacks. "It makes you like the crowded Waikiki Beach," she said.



INJURY: Five puncture wounds to left calf,

FIRST AID: Dunn thinks her wet suit protected her leg and might have prevented a serious injury. Back on shore her wounds were washed with soap and water, then wrapped in paper towels and blue packing tape.

TREATMENT: Chris Smith, drove her to Kahuku Hospital, where she received a tetanus shot and intravenous antibiotics, and her leg was bandaged.

SPECIES: According to her doctors, the spacing of the puncture wounds suggest the incident involved a large [10'] tiger shark. In tiger sharks that the fisheries have caught, Naughton said, "we find pigs and goats. One time off Waimea (Kaua'i), we found a horse's head in a shark's belly. People have got to stay out of the turbid water. There's a lot of dead animals in there. Cats, dogs, rats, all kinds. I can guarantee you've got tiger sharks and they're feeding."

NOTE: This was the first shark accident reported on O'ahu since February 16, 2005, when a shark estimated to be eight feet long bit Greg Long's surfboard near Sunset Beach. That incident took place at 14h30 in the afternoon in clear water about 10 feet deep.

SOURCES: Eloise Aguiar, Honolulu Advertiser, Friday March 24, 2006
<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2006/Mar/24/In/FP603240357.html>
Star Bulletin, <http://archives.starbulletin.com/2006/03/24/news/story05.html>



Rebecca Breyer, The Honolulu Advertiser

Elizabeth Dunn recuperates with her partner, Chris Smith, at Backpackers Vacation Inn.