

ACTIVITY: Wading

CASE: 2006.04.03

DATE: Monday April 3, 2006.

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Gulf of Mexico off the north end of Sand Dollar Island, adjacent to Tigertail Beach, Marco Island, Collier County, Florida, USA.

25.9°N, 81.7°W

NAME: Paul Ausum

DESCRIPTION: He is an 11-year-old male from White Lake, Michigan.

BACKGROUND

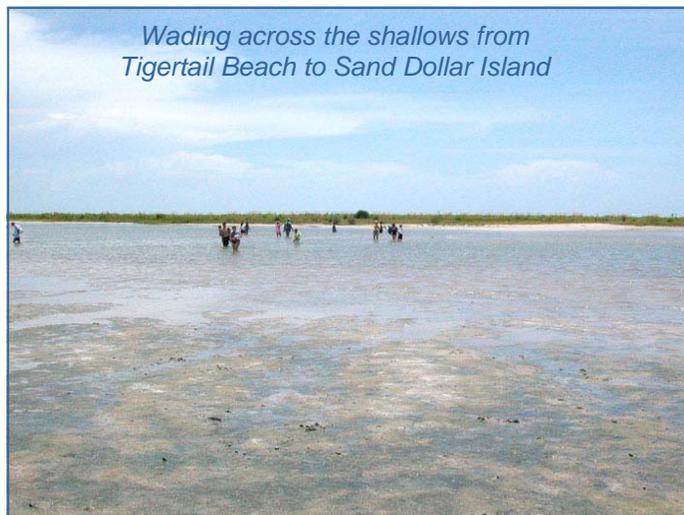
WEATHER: At 12h53, Naples weather station recorded clear skies and visibility of 10 miles [16.1 km]. The air temperature was 77°F [25°C], dew point 64°F [17.8°C], humidity 64%, sea level pressure 30.10 inches [1019.1 hPa], and wind direction was West at 9.2 mph [14.8 km/h]. At 14h00, Marco Island recorded scattered clouds and air temperature of 85°F.

MOON PHASE: Waxing Crescent, 30% of the moon's visible disk was illuminated.

SEA CONDITIONS: Marco Island Environmental Specialist Nancy Richie, said Gulf water temperatures are between 73°F and 76°F degrees and are beginning to rise. Mean low tide at Fort Myers occurred at 12h40.

ENVIRONMENT: Marco Island is actually a maze of 'finger canals' carved by developers in order that most residents have a canal in their backyard so they can 'be on the water'. Sand Dollar Island is a flat, treeless and wide sandbar (one source describes it as a sandspit extending from Tigertail Beach). The water between Sand Dollar Island and Marco Island is shallow and, despite a muddy bottom, it is usually clear.

The rising sea temperatures correlate with the spawning season for fish meaning there is an abundance of bait fish near shore, according to Richie. "Naturally, this draws the larger fish and predators like sharks into wading depth waters. It's a common occurrence this time of year." Several species of sharks such as black tips, hammerheads and nurse sharks are commonly seen and caught by fishermen off Sand Dollar and Hideaway Beach, she said. "Inlets are areas where sharks feed because of the good currents and abundance of fish. So with Sand Dollar at the mouth of the inlet, yes, it would be a likely feeding ground for sharks."



DEPTH OF WATER: Waist-deep

TIME: 12h30

NARRATIVE: Paul Ausum and his father, 45-year-old Peter Ausum, were at the beach with his mother and two sisters. Paul and his father were walking along the beach when they saw baitfish jumping just offshore. As Paul jumped into the water amid the baitfish, his father saw a shark dart towards the boy. The shark was apparently feeding on baitfish and nipped Paul's hand.

Courtney McLean of Philadelphia was the only eyewitness to the bite. McLean told beach officials she heard a commotion in the water and then Paul's scream. She said the bite didn't look serious as Ausum took off his shirt and wrapped it around his son's hand. The two walked back toward the Tigertail Beach Pavilion.

"We can't make people stay out of the water," said Captain Tom Carr of the Marco Island Police Department. "It's not like there's a shark chasing around people. The shark was feeding on shark bait." Afterwards, beachgoers were warned to stay out of the water, but swimming was not banned at the beach.

INJURY: Paul sustained lacerations and puncture wounds to his right hand and buttocks. City Manager Bill Moss also reported that the boy's swim trunks were torn. According to police, the boy's injuries were not serious.

TREATMENT: Emergency response crews met the boy and his family in the parking lot at Tigertail. The boy's injuries were bandaged by paramedics and/or Marco Island Police and Fire Departments. The family did not want EMS transport, and instead drove to the Sarazen Urgent Care Center [or Marco Island Health Care Center] where Paul's injuries were repaired with a few stitches and he was released three hours after being injured by the shark.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified. According to Peter the shark was four to five feet in length. Several species of sharks such as blacktips, hammerheads and nurse sharks are commonly seen and caught by fishermen off Sand Dollar and Hideaway Beach. Tigertail Beach county park ranger Roger Rienke said a fisherman caught a five-foot blacktip shark off Sand Dollar Island about a week ago.

Reinke said the boy's family had parked at Tigertail Beach Park, and he's not so sure the attack didn't occur inside park waters. "What we call Sand Dollar Island begins on the other side of the lagoon at Tigertail Beach," Reinke said. "One of the big problems is figuring out what area you're talking about. Where does Hideaway Beach, Tigertail Beach and Sand Dollar Island begin and end? I believe it's likely that the shark attack occurred inside the Tigertail park area. That's where the family was when we went to talk to them."

SOURCES: CBS Broadcasting, Inc, http://cbs4.com/topstories/local_story_094084008.html
Sun Herald,
<http://www.sun-herald.com/NewsArchive2/040506/ew10.htm?date=040506&story=ew10.htm>
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