

ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE: GSAF 2006.06.05

DATE: Monday 5 June 2006

LOCATION: The incident took place in Encounter Bay at Waitpinga Beach on the Fleurieu Peninsula, 80 kilometres south of Adelaide, South Australia, Australia.

35°37'S, 138°29'E

NAME: Peter Dunn

DESCRIPTION: The surfer, a 40-year-old male, is 175 cm in height and weighs 71 kilograms. He is a fireman from Hallett Cove, a suburb of Adelaide. Dunn has been surfing for 25 years and is a competitive surfer. He was wearing a full-length black wetsuit.

SURFBOARD: A 6'4" white trifin board with black fins.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: In Victor Harbor, according to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, at 09h00 the sky was cloudy (7/8 of sky covered), the air temperature was 10.2°C, and the wind direction was 020°

at 01 knots. By 12h00 the air temperature was 13.7°C, and wind direction was 140° at 01 knots. According to press reports, the sky was clear at Waitpinga and there was a 10-knot northerly (offshore) breeze.

MOON PHASE: Waxing Gibbous with 64% of the Moon's visible disk was illuminated.

SEA CONDITIONS: The Australian Bureau of Meteorology reported that the mean sea surface temperature along the coast of South Australian was around 21°C. At Victor Harbor, low tide was at 03h53, high tide was at 15h35. The water was clear at Waitpinga with 20 metres underwater visibility. Surface conditions were perfect; the waves were clean and glassy with one-metre southwesterly swells. Dunn estimates the sea temperature was about 14°C.

ENVIRONMENT: Waitpinga is a renowned surfing and salmon fishing beach, and shark sightings are common there. In 1989, local bodyboarder Matthew Foale was killed by a white shark (see GSAF 1989.03.09) at Waitpinga Beach. Owner of surf website Swellnet, Ben Matson, said there had been a rise in shark sightings in recent times, with at least one report a week. Shark sightings had become more frequent along the Fleurieu Peninsula in weeks preceding this incident; Adelaide surfers David Robinson and Michael Taing spotted a large shark, believed to be a white shark approximately four metres in length, at Middleton Beach on Sunday, 25 kilometres northeast from Waitpinga. Four sightings of sharks were recorded by PIRSA's Fishwatch reporting line in the past month, PIRSA Fisheries spokesman Mark Lewis said, "There are really good schools of salmon and trout on the South Coast at the moment, whenever that happens, it attracts sharks."

Dunn surfs regularly in the area and said he generally sees sea lions or seals, but on this



Photo: Dylan Coker

particular occasion they were absent while he was there, however, he noticed a flock of seagulls diving into the water approximately 200 metres seaward. The seafloor beneath Dunn consisted of sand.

It is also possible that these sharks may be following the recent arrival of Southern Right Whales at nearby Bashams Beach (as reported by the South Australian Whale Centre (<http://www.victor.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=452>), but at the time of the incident no juvenile whales had been spotted.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 60 metres

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: 1.5 metres

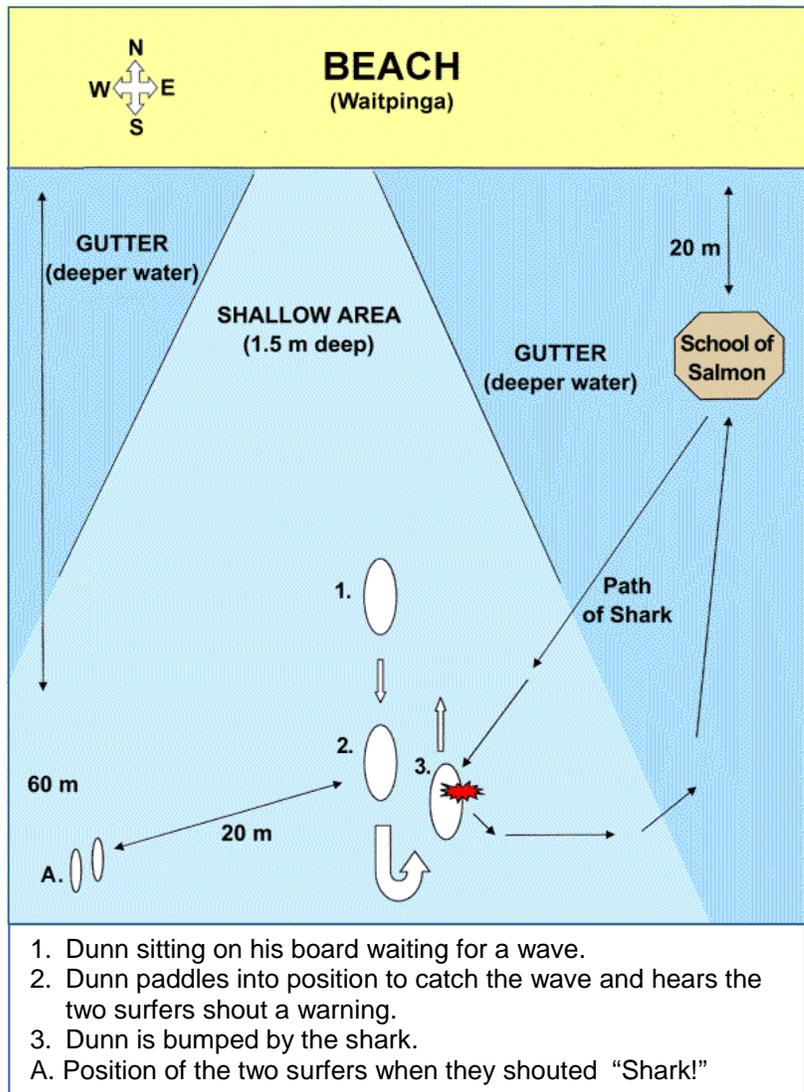
TIME: 11h30

NARRATIVE: Peter Dunn had been in the water for about 45 minutes and was facing seawards, sitting upright on his board, waiting patiently for a wave, and paddling with slow, smooth movements of his hands in order to maintain his position. He saw a wave building and thought he could catch it so he started to paddle a bit harder towards it to get himself into a better position. He was opposite the main carpark when he noticed a large school of salmon swimming in an adjacent gutter. As he spun around to catch a wave, two surfers about 20 metres away yelled “shark!”.

Dunn saw the shark approaching from below, “It was huge”, Dunn recalled. The shark’s two-foot-high dorsal fin broke the surface, and seconds later “it gave my board a nudge with its snout, almost knocking me off”, said Dunn. The shark struck the surfboard at a 45 degree angle about one-third the way down from the tip of the nose of the board. Dunn was thrown backwards, but he managed to lean forward, grab the front of the board and avoided falling into the water.

Then the shark rolled to its left, about 20 degrees, just enough for Dunn to see the shark’s eye and teeth. Dunn said that no part of the shark’s head ever broke the surface but it came within a few centimetres of doing so. All he could see of the shark was the area from its snout to its first dorsal fin. His last glimpse of the shark was as it headed back in roughly the

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same direction from which it came. The shark's movements were slow and casual the entire time; it never increased its swimming speed or made any rapid directional changes. "The shark didn't appear to be overly aggressive; it just gave me a bump, but I wasn't going to stick around any longer", Dunn said. He caught the next wave to shore.

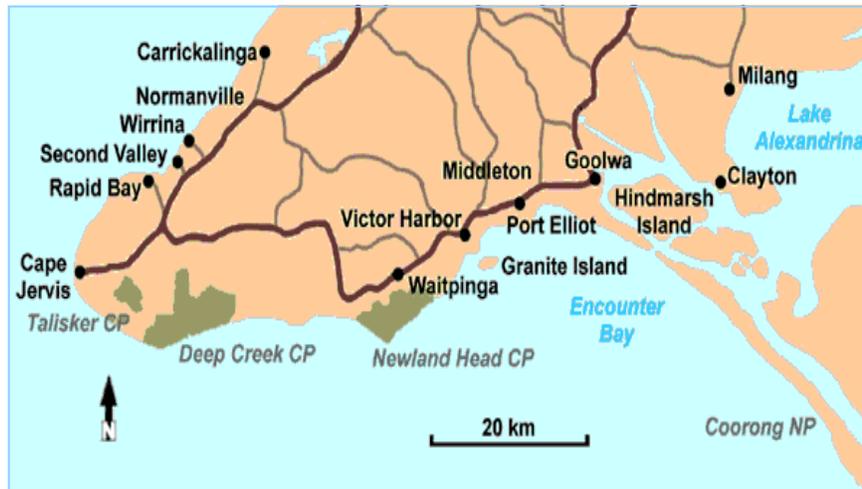
Surfers in the carpark atop the cliff told Dunn that the shark came from a school of salmon 20 metres from shore in an adjacent gutter. After nudging Dunn's board, the shark returned to the salmon school. They saw the shark streak through the gutter, dividing the salmon into two large schools, and then it disappeared from view.

SPECIES: The incident involved a white shark. According to Dunn, the shark was "about 14 feet in length and at least four feet across." This shark is believed to be the same white shark seen regularly by local surfers in recent weeks. In fact, Dunn saw another large shark, possibly the same one, just a few weeks earlier at the same beach from the safety of the carpark, and elected not to go out.

This incident was not Dunn's first close-up experience with a shark in South Australian waters. Dunn was surfing alone at a nearby reef break in the late 90's when a curious white shark popped up metres from him. The shark eyed him closely for several moments before swimming away.

SOURCES: Australian Bureau of Meteorology; Ben Matson. (the owner of Swellnet) http://www.swellnet.com.au/dispatch/SA_sharks_060606.phpm; Sunday Mail (Adelaide) 11 June 2006, Page 17; personal interview with Peter Dunn, 16 June 2006

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Philip C. Kemp, Global Shark Accident File





Waitpinga is an exposed beach and reef break that has pretty consistent surf. Offshore winds are from the north-northeast. Clean groundswells prevail and the best swell direction is from the south-southwest. Waves at the beach are both rights and lefts, and both right and left reef breaks add variety.

