



ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE: [GSAF 2015.08.29.b](#)

DATE: Saturday August 29, 2015

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean at Morro Strand State Beach, about 0.5 miles north of Morro Rock, San Luis Obispo County, California, USA.

NAME: Elinor Dempsey,

DESCRIPTION: A 54-year-old female from Los Osos, California. She is 5'5", 140 lbs, wearing a black wetsuit and barefoot.

SURBOARD: Red (both sides), 9-foot single fin board.



BACKGROUND

WEATHER: At 09h56, KSBP (the airport closest to Morro Bay) recorded clear skies and 10-mile visibility. The air temperature was 77°F, dew point 59°F, humidity 54%, sea level pressure 29.96 inches and wind direction was NW at 8.1 mph. The air temperature at the incident site was about 70°F.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon

SEA CONDITIONS: There was an early season swell and the sea surface temperature was 62°F, estimated. The ocean was glassy water with underwater visibility greater than the depth of the water.

ENVIRONMENT: The incident took place over a sandy bottom. Several fish were observed jumping out of the water prior to the incident. According to some local surfers in Morro Bay, the shark bumped a few guys and the lifeguards were clearing the water. By the time they got to the north end of Morro Strand this had happened.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 100 yards, outside of the break

DEPTH OF WATER: 12 to 15 feet

TIME: 10h25



NARRATIVE: The fog was just burning off and the sun was out. Elinor Dempsey had been in the water about 35 minutes when she saw the shark approach her about two feet underwater.

"I was sitting on my board looking down. I saw a very large animal swim under me diagonally pointed away from the shore. Moments later (I don't know how long between the time I saw the shark and when it breached) the shark was up out of the water and its torso about eight inches from my face. The torso was at least two feet wide and I remember thinking it was so close I could pat it. Its skin looked like a dolphin and, at first that is what I thought it was. Because I thought it was a dolphin getting aggressive I did not panic.



Ralph Collier and Elinor Dempsey with the damaged surfboard

"I was knocked off my board into the water but recall pushing my board towards the shark and me away from the shark. I quickly turned towards my right shoulder to swim to shore.

"Out of the corner of my eye I saw the shark chomp down on my board. I continued swimming toward shore and did not look back.

"I stopped swimming after about 30 yards to reel in my board, got back on it and began paddling. A nearby surfer helped to keep me paddling and then pushed me into a wave that brought me back into shore.



"The two men closest to me saw more of the shark than I did. I heard from another guy that was about 200 feet from me that he saw my board go up in the air after the bite."

State Parks closed the beach between Morro Rock and Cayucos for 72 hours.

INJURY: No injury but the shark bit an 8 inch by 14-inch section from the surfboard. The only injury I sustained is a bruise on my right shin probably where the right rail of my board hit me.

SPECIES: White shark. Dempsey estimated the shark was seven to eight feet in length. The bite to the surfboard is on the left rail. The diameter of the bite is 14 inches with identifiable lower jaw tooth impressions in the underside of the board. 'Interspace measurements' of five individual tooth impressions to the board's bottom are comparable to a white shark 11 to 12 feet in length.

COMMENT: White sharks have been protected in California for 15 years which has helped their population grow. That, and with more people in the water, contributes to the number of shark-human encounters. Furthermore, given that this is an El Nino year, warmer water is bringing fish closer to shore, which brings seals and sea lions — animals on which white sharks prey — closer to shore. This incident is one of multiple human-shark encounters along the Central Coast in the past several months. It is noteworthy that this attack occurred about 30 minutes after and 0.5 miles North of Daniel Phillips' incident at *'The Rock.'*

SOURCES: Interview with Elinor Dempsey & examination of her surfboard

Surflife, August 29, 2015

http://www.surflife.com/surf-news/juvenile-great-white-takes-bite-out-of-los-osos-womans-board-at-morro-strand-beach-surfer-escapes-unharmd-aft_130948/

The Tribune, August 29, 2015

http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2015/08/29/3783230_surfer-unhurt-after-shark-attack.html?rh=1

Fox News, August 30, 2015

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/08/30/surfer-narrowly-escapes-shark-attack-off-california-coast/>

The Tribune, August 29, 2015

http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2015/08/29/3783230_surfer-unhurt-after-shark-attack.html?rh=1

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Ralph Collier



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