



Refugio State Beach is shown in this undated photo featured on California State Parks' web and Facebook pages.

**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing / free diving

**CASE:** [GSAF 2016.09.01](#)

**DATE:** Thursday September 1, 2016

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean at Refugio State Beach, Santa Barbara County, California, USA.

**NAME:** Tyler McQuillen

**DESCRIPTION:** A 22-year-old male



*Tyler McQuillen*

### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** At 08h53, Santa Barbara Municipal Airport recorded eight-mile visibility and partly cloudy skies. The air temperature was 66°F, dew point 63°F, humidity 90%, sea level pressure 29.91 inches and wind direction was South at 4.5 mph. At Refugio State Beach, the sky was clear and the air temperature was 72°F, estimated.

**MOON PHASE:** New Moon

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea temperature was about 70°F, the ocean was calm with a one to two-foot swell over a sandy ocean bottom, and underwater visibility was 10 feet.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Refugio State Beach is a protected state beach park located 20 miles west of Santa Barbara, California. It is 2.5 miles west of El Capitán State Beach. No fish had been speared by either diver.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 150 yards, and 50 yards from the point.

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Ten feet

**TIME:** 09h00

**NARRATIVE:** At 08h45, Tyler McQuillen and a friend had been in the water about 15 minutes. *"While swimming near the surface I observed a small Bat Ray bounce up off the bottom and quickly swim off. A behavior I had not seen previously when encountering them during my dives." Initially, when the shark grabbed his swim fin he thought it was his friend, Brent, playing a joke and did turn around. "Within a few seconds I felt a very strong pressure on my right foot. I was jerked backwards with such force that I dropped my speargun with GoPro camera attached. My fin and bootie were dislodged from my right foot as I swam back to retrieve my speargun. After grabbing my gun I turned upward and was immediately struck on my left side by*

*the shark. It continued past me and within a few seconds came at me a third time, whereupon I struck it on its right side as it turned to swim off. I did not hesitate but immediately began swimming backwards toward the beach so I could watch for the shark should it return again.”*

Eric Hjelstrom, State Parks Superintendent, interviewed the diver in the hospital, viewed the video and confirmed the incident. Parks protocol requires an aquatic activity closure for a 24-hour period. The area re-opened to public use next day at noon.

**INJURY:** Two toes of the diver’s left foot were broken and lacerated.

**FIRST AID / TREATMENT:** McQuillen drove himself to a hospital where his injury was treated. His wounds were not life-threatening.

**SPECIES:** A eight- to ten-foot white shark. McQuillen said researchers told him the shark was not looking for food. Instead, it was being territorial and confused him with another shark. “That’s why he came up from behind me and bit my fin, because they normally come behind sharks and bite their tails to let them know to get out of the area. So he was trying to defend his territory,” he said. He said the incident wasn’t the adrenaline rush he was looking for while spearfishing that day, but he can’t wait to jump back in the water once he is medically cleared. “When you go into the water, you take that chance, and that’s a chance I’m willing to take, because it’s what I enjoy doing,” he explained.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Ralph Collier

**SOURCES:** Shark Research Committee, September 1, 2016  
[http://www.sharkresearchcommittee.com/pacific\\_coast\\_shark\\_news.htm](http://www.sharkresearchcommittee.com/pacific_coast_shark_news.htm)

KSBY, September 1, 2016

<http://www.ksby.com/story/32976375/shark-attacks-freediver-at-refugio-state-beach>

Ventura County Star, Sept. 2, 2016, 2:56 a.m.

<http://www.vcstar.com/story/news/special-reports/outdoors/2016/09/01/refugio-beach-closed-after-man-reports-shark-bite/89740816/>

Santa Barbara Independent, September 2, 2016

<http://www.independent.com/news/2016/sep/02/shark-bites-free-diver-refugio/>

Mashable, September 12, 2016

<http://mashable.com/2016/09/12/shark-attack-spear-gun/#Vjdl5LxSO8qC>

ABC 7 News, September 14, 2016

<http://abc7.com/news/diver-attacked-by-shark-off-santa-barbara-coast-thought-he-was-finished/1511157/>