

ACTIVITY: Probable drowning and scavenging

CASE: GSAF 1980.03.30 / SA-287

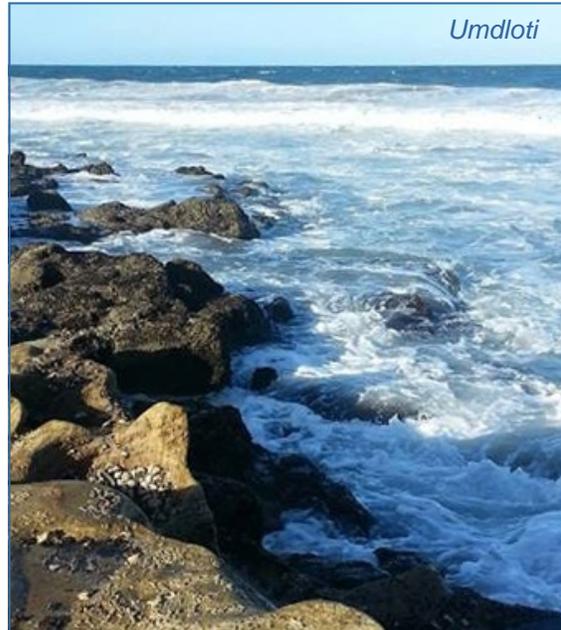
DATE: Sunday March 30, 1980

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean on a shallow submerged reef a kilometer north of the Umdloti River mouth, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

NAME: Ray Booth

DESCRIPTION: He was a 52-year-old male, a physically fit experienced diver wearing a rugby jersey over a neoprene wet suit top and white sand shoes (takkies).

NARRATIVE: Ray Booth and his son had been crayfishing and were returning to shore when Booth disappeared. A life-saver and members of the S.A. Police Reserve Diving Unit searched the area but were unable to find any trace of the missing diver before nightfall.



Next morning the divers resumed the search, aided by a Defence Force helicopter. At 09h10 divers found what remained of the body: head, neck, shoulders, arms, and most of the rib cage had been removed by shark/s. The right leg had been severed below the knee, both femurs were exposed along most of their length and parallel gouge marks were evident on one femur. Although the left tibia and fibula were exposed the left foot was intact. Very little tissue was left on what remained of the pelvis, ribs and spinal column but the clean slices through the transverse process of the spinal vertebrae were typical of those of a tiger shark with a jaw gape of at least 35 centimetres.

“It would appear that the shark seemed intent on removing all flesh and any detachable extremities and that the only reason that the left foot remained intact was because it may have been inaccessible to the shark,” reported Walter Pople, Research Officer of the Natal Sharks Board. “This suggests that the diver may have accidentally wedged his foot in a rock crevice and drowned. Some time during the next 20 hours the body was scavenged by a medium to large tiger shark. Later, due to the loss of tissue fluid, the foot shrank and slipped from the wedged shoe.”

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Walter Pople, Natal Sharks Board