

ACTIVITY: Spearfishing

CASE: GSAF 1985.01.00.a / SA-347

DATE: January 1985

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean at Salt Rock, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

NAME: Barry Allan Coppin

DESCRIPTION: He is a 20-year-old male. He was wearing a three-millimetre wetsuit.



BACKGROUND

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was calm and clear with 18-metre visibility. A slight southerly current was flowing and the surface water was unusually warm; the diver estimated it was about 25°C.

ENVIRONMENT: The incident took place in the northern sector of Salt Rock between the main reef and the tidal pool.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 300 metres

DEPTH OF WATER: 12 metres, but the incident took place 4.5 metres below the surface.

TIME: 11h00

NARRATIVE: Coppin entered the water at 09h00 and, two hours later, had a couta *Scomberomorus commerson*, on his stringer. A shark, apparently attracted by the spearfishing activity, began harassing him. Coppin was below the surface when the shark charged. "I didn't have much of an option at that stage," said the diver, "I felt that I had no choice but to shoot the shark."

As the wounded shark lunged at the diver's head and shoulder he tried to fend it away, but it bit his arm. Coppin's dive buddy, Rory O'Connor, managed to push the shark away with his gun.

INJURY: The diver sustained four shallow lacerations about four millimetres in length on his upper right arm. The arm of his wet suit was ripped and torn.

SPECIES: The incident involved a dusky shark, estimated to be 1.5 metres in length.

NOTE: This is considered a provoked incident. The spearfishermen assumed the shark was about to bite him, but whenever a spearfisherman shoots a shark there is a chance that the shark will retaliate as it did in this case.

SOURCE: Interviews with Barry Coppin and Rory O'Connor.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine



Scomberomorus commerson