

ACTIVITY: Kayaking

CASE: GSAF 1989.01.26.a

DATE: Thursday January 26, 1989

LOCATION: The attack took place in the Pacific Ocean off Latigo Point / Paradise Cove, west of Malibu, Los Angeles County, California, USA.

34°01.2'N, 118°46.5'W

NAME: Tamara McAllister

DESCRIPTION: She was a 24-year-old female, a qualified scuba diver and experienced swimmer. Together with 24-year-old Jeffrey Stoddard, a UCLA master's candidate in public health, she was training for an upcoming triathlon. The couple kayaked and swam almost daily.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Waning Gibbous, 81% of the Moon's visible disk was illuminated. Full Moon, January 21, 1989.

ENVIRONMENT: Pinnipeds are known to frequent the area of the Coast Guard buoy and from time to time are known to "haul out" onto this convenient resting place.

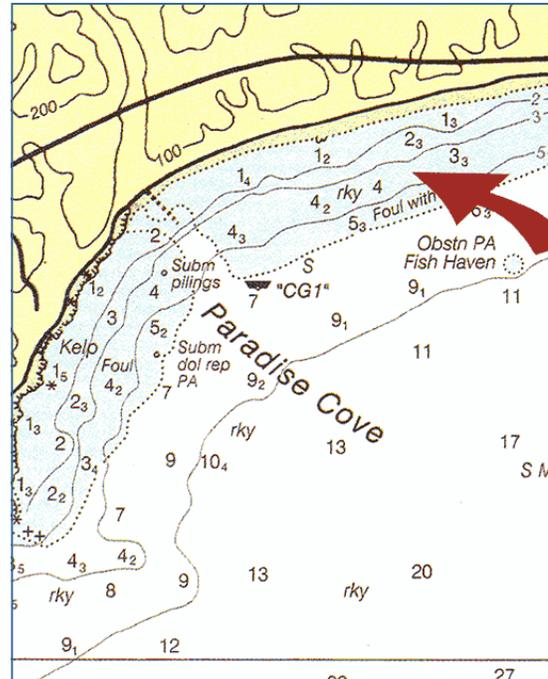
TIME: After 09h30, most likely at 10h15

NARRATIVE: The couple were observed on the beach with hot beverages and muffins shortly before 0900. The last time anyone would remember seeing McAllister and Stoddard was about 09h30 when they were observed launching their kayaks and paddling around Latigo Point as they headed north toward Paradise Cove.

At about 10h15, Margaret Bloom, a resident of Paradise Cove, returned home from an early morning doctor's appointment and was standing in front of her living room picture windows, looking out at the cove. She observed "a heavy boiling and thrashing in the water out past the kelp beds." The commotion was west and south of the U.S. Coast Guard buoy. Bloom continues, "There was a lot of splashing water and a churning of the ocean. It was like a whirlpool, maybe 15 to 20 feet across. It lasted about five to 10 minutes, then stopped, with all going quiet in the water." Bloom said the pinnipeds on the buoy appeared to be "trying to crawl up on top of it. They were very agitated when the water was being churned up."

From the many trips the young couple had taken together, they knew it would take them 45 to 60 minutes to reach the area of the buoy, a location they had traditionally used during their almost daily trips to the area. The wind was light when they departed, a condition which would change dramatically in a few short minutes.

After rounding Latigo Point, they were not seen by anyone known to be in the area at that time. No one remembered seeing the couple kayaking from Latigo Point to Paradise Cove, a distance of more than 2.5 kilometres requiring at least 45 minutes to complete.



The next day, Friday January 27, 1989, the two kayaks were found lashed together, upside down, six kilometres off nearby Zuma Beach in Los Angeles County. They were towed to Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard, Ventura County, and were subsequently turned over to the Ventura County Sheriff's Department on January 30, 1989. At 16h30 hours on Saturday January 28, 1988. Tamara McAllister's body was found 10 kilometres from Channel Islands Harbor (34°05.0'N, 119°18.0'W) on a heading of 220° true. She was wearing a bathing suit and a zippered blue and black windbreaker jacket. The U.S. Coast Guard began a search-and-rescue operation for Stoddard. The extensive search for him was called off after a week. He was never found.



Tamara McAllister

INJURY: Fatal

COMMENT: I invested several weeks interviewing local residents, business owners, and others known to be in the area the day McAllister and Stoddard disappeared. No one could remember seeing the couple following their departure at Latigo Point. There are probably countless scenarios for this tragic event. The following is one possibility out of many and is based on circumstantial evidence.

After launching their kayaks from Latigo Point, the couple usually paddled out until they were 50 to 100 metres offshore, just inside the kelp canopies, before turning north to Paradise Cove. Once they had arrived at their destination they would swim, talk, and sometimes have a snack before returning to Latigo Point. According to friends familiar with their routines, this trip usually took McAllister and Stoddard 45 to 60 minutes. They could have arrived only minutes after the commotion Bloom reported near the buoy. This commotion may have been a shark feeding on one of the pinnpeds that had been on or near the buoy.

McAllister was found wearing her windbreaker jacket, making it reasonable to assume that she was not swimming at the time of the accident. The kayaks were found lashed together, suggesting that they were stationary in the water. However, I propose that they might have been trying to return to Latigo Point in heavy seas, with headwinds gusting 30 to 50 knots. McAllister's kayak had a small crack in the skin of its hull, causing it to take on water. With her slight build, it might have been difficult for McAllister to maneuver her kayak in the headwinds and choppy seas. The kayaks might have been lashed together by the couple in an attempt to combat these rough conditions. Stoddard would have been in the lead kayak, McAllister the following. With both paddling together, Stoddard would have been able to cut a wake, thereby reducing McAllister's effort.

A hole was discovered in the bow of the white kayak's underbelly. Also present were fractures to either side of the hull. They appear to be stress fractures, caused when the kayak was struck from below. An engineer familiar with the construction and material used in today's kayaks suggested that the observed damage would require the hull to be struck by an object with a mass in excess of 900 kilograms, traveling at least 17 knots, to cause

the damage sustained. Several kayak manufacturers said that a kayak's construction actually causes it to recoil from an object when struck. This flexible construction could have caused the kayak to be lifted into the air when struck from below with sufficient force.

With McAllister's kayak being towed behind Stoddard's, she would have been thrown backwards, possibly striking her head and/or hand on the kayak's surface. In contrast, Stoddard would have been violently thrown forward and could have struck his head on his kayak's hatch cover, a piece of plywood 25 mm in thickness. Several small, rounded indentations on the surface of the plywood hatch cover were found and examined. Forensic investigation found no hair, tissue or linen fibers. The source of these indentations could not be determined.

SPECIES: Ventura County Coroner Warren Lovell, with the assistance of investigators Jim Wingate and Mitch Breese, determined the following: "Tamara McAllister died from exsanguination, the result of massive tissue loss to the upper left thigh and a traumatic wound to the upper right thigh that severed the femoral artery and vein. Measurement of the left thigh injury exceed 34 centimetres in diameter." Bruises to the right hand and back of her head were also reported. The dimensions of Tamara McAllister's injury suggests that a white shark about five metres in length was involved in this tragedy.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Ralph Collier



© Ralph Collier, 1989. All rights reserved. This report may not be abridged or reproduced in any form without written permission of the author.

Photograph by Author



Photograph by Author



© Ralph Collier, 1989. All rights reserved. This report may not be abridged or reproduced in any form without written permission of the author.