



ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1994.01.03

DATE: Monday January 3, 1994

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean off the main swimming beach at Hibberdene on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

30°34'S, 30°35'E

NAME: Ian Galbraith

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer, a 33-year-old male, was on holiday from Australia, visiting his parents who live in the province. He is 185 cm in height and weighs 75 kg. He was wearing a black "speedo" swim suit but no jewelry. The day before the incident he had dropped a brick on the dorsal surface of his left foot, and the wound was open at the time of the incident.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a hot, cloudy and windy day.

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, January 5, 1994

SEA CONDITIONS: There was a longshore channel immediately behind the shorebreak rising to a sandbank in the mid break zone. Low tide was at 18h05. At first light the following day the water visibility at the Hibberdene shark nets was four to six metres and the water temperature was 24°C.

ENVIRONMENT: The beach is "protected" by shark nets.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 15 metres, and 10 metres north of a rock outcrop.

DEPTH: 1.5 metres

TIME: 16h15

INARRATIVE: Ian Galbraith had been swimming for 10 minutes. Although there were about 20 people on the beach, he was the only person in the water. He was facing seaward when he felt something brush past his left leg, followed by a brief pressure on his left foot. As he pulled his leg away, he felt something rough, "like scales", moving across his leg. He quickly swam back to shore.

INJURY: There was an arc of very shallow puncture marks on the dorsal of the foot. These were presumably inflicted by the upper jaw of the shark. The lacerations on the left heel are not clear in photographs and were probably inflicted by the teeth of the lower jaw. The wounds on the instep and heel required 32 sutures. There were no abrasions on the left leg which resulted when the shark "brushed" against the swimmer.

FIRST AID/TREATMENT: Galbraith was taken by car to the Medical Centre in Hibberdene where he was examined by Dr Tainton, who cleaned and sutured the wounds.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Jeremy Cliff interviewed Mr Galbraith on January 8, 1993 and photographed the wounds. He reported: "The crescent-shaped puncture marks on the top of the foot are characteristic of a shark bite. The marks are closely spaced and their arrangement is indicative of the gape of the shark's jaw. It would appear that they belong to a shark of no more than 1.3 m PCL. These puncture marks are extremely superficial and it is difficult to tell whether they were inflicted by spike-like, grabbing teeth or triangular cutting teeth. Nothing can be gleaned from the lacerations on the victim's heel. Members of the genus *Carcharhinus* are the most common sharks of this size in the coastal waters of Natal. A number of species from this genus have been implicated in attacks on swimmers along the KwaZulu-Natal coast; they are the dusky shark, Zambesi and blacktip. Another possibility is the scalloped hammerhead, which is also common on the KwaZulu-Natal coast. This species has not been implicated in an attack in South African waters. The identity of the shark responsible therefore remains unknown."

"It is interesting to note that the foot which was bitten bore an open wound. The area in which the incident occurred was very rocky. The shark could either have crossed the sandbank immediately seaward of the incident or it could have approached from the gap in the rocks to the south."

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Jeremy Cliff, Natal Sharks Board