

**ACTIVITY:** Watching seals

**CASE:** GSAF 1997.01.01

**DATE:** Wednesday January 1, 1997

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Bass Strait off Seal Rocks, Phillip Island, Victoria, Australia



**BOAT:** Inflatable dinghy

**OCCUPANTS:** Jasmine Wigley, Greg Wilkie, Phil Rourke and Fleur Anderson

## **BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** Third Quarter, January 2, 1997

**ENVIRONMENT:** Seal Rocks, located on the far south-western tip of Phillip Island close to the Nobbie rock formation, boasts one of Australia's largest fur seal colonies with the number of seals peaking during breeding from October to December.

**TIME:** Just before 15h00

**NARRATIVE:** No one on board the dinghy saw the shark before it slammed into the boat, throwing Jasmine Whitley into the water. Then the shark bit a hole in the side of the boat and pulled it beneath the surface. Rourke, who was driving the boat, said he whacked the shark on the top of the head when it sank its teeth into the boat next to him as he was driving, then he accelerated and swung the boat around to collect Ms. Whitley from the water.

He said the four huddled on the part of the boat still afloat and tried to paddle to shore at Seal Rocks, off the Nobbies, but were stopped by currents. They paddled for 30 minutes and then decided to swim the 60 metres to shore. As the two girls swam to shore, Rourke swam under the boat and retrieved the flares and helped Wilkie remove his coat. Then the two men swam to shore and lit the flare.

When a cruise boat, *Bay Connections*, came close they signaled they had been attacked by a shark and could not swim out to the vessel to be rescued. Minutes later a helicopter arrived and the four sightseers were winched to safety. A nearby fishing boat recovered the wrecked and partly submerged Zodiac.

**INJURY:** No injury to occupants

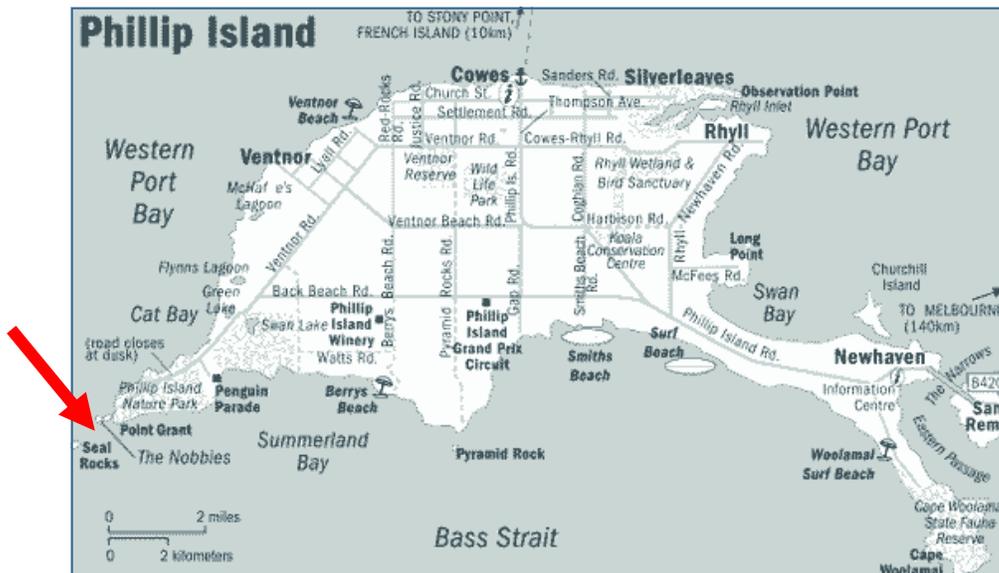
**DAMAGE TO BOAT:** The shark bit two of the dinghy's three floatation chambers.

**SPECIES:** White shark

**SOURCES:** The Advertiser, January 2, 1997, Page 13 and January 3, 1997, Page 7



*The Nobbies & Seal Rocks*



### Four survive white pointer `Jaws' attack

A terrified Victorian boat owner told yesterday how a huge white pointer shark attacked his rubber dinghy, tearing a hole in the side.

Phil Rourke, 32, of Carnegie, was in the inflatable Zodiac off Phillip Island with three friends when the shark slammed into the boat just before 3pm, plunging one of the women on board into the water.

In scenes reminiscent of the horror film Jaws, the shark bit a hole in the side of the boat and pulled it beneath the surface.

Mr Rourke and his friends ~ Fleur Anderson, 28, of Carnegie, Greg Wilkie, 45, of Prahran, and Jasmine Whitley, 34, of Somers ~ were sightseeing when the shark attacked.

Mr Rourke said he whacked the shark on the top of the head when it sank its teeth into the boat just next to him as he was driving. He then accelerated and swung the boat around to collect Ms Whitley from the water.

Mr Rourke said the shark "came from nowhere. I was sitting there and it just appeared between me and Greg, and it hit us that hard it threw one of the girls out of the boat," he said. "I hit the accelerator and swung around to try and get Jasmine in the boat."

He said the four then huddled on the part of the boat still afloat and tried to paddle to shore at Seal Rocks, off the Nobbies, but were stopped by currents.

The group paddled for 30 minutes, not knowing whether the shark would strike again, and were left with no choice but to swim the 60m to shore.

"I had to swim under the boat to reach the flares," Mr Rourke said.

"The two girls swam to shore but Greg had a big Drizabone coat on and I had to help him get that off.

"We then swam to the shore and I lit the flare and a cruiser saw it."

Mr Rourke that when the cruise boat, Bay Connections, came close they signalled they had been attacked by a shark and could not swim out to the vessel to be rescued.

Minutes later a helicopter arrived and the four stranded sightseers were winched to safety.

A nearby fishing boat came to the rescue and dragged the wrecked, partly submerged Zodiac to safety.

Cowes Police Sergeant John Nolan said the four friends were "lucky to be alive after the ordeal".

**SOURCE:** Michael Gleeson in Melbourne, The Advertiser, January 2, 1997, Page 13