

**ACTIVITY:** Surfing

**CASE:** GSAF 1998.04.21

**DATE:** Tuesday April 21, 1998

**LOCATION:** The incident took place the Pacific Ocean at Gleneden Beach, about 10 km south of Lincoln City in northwestern Oregon, USA.

44°53'N; 124°02.6'W

**NAME:** John Forse

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 50-year-old male. He was wearing a full black wetsuit and booties.

**SURFBOARD:** A three-metre black board.

### BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** The sky was clear and the air temperature was about 13°C.

**MOON PHASE:** Waning Crescent, 32% of the Moon's visible disk was illuminated. New Moon on April 26, 1997.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was calm and glassy, the water temperature was about 12°C, and the underwater visibility was two to three metres.

**ENVIRONMENT:** The sea floor was primarily sand with many sandbars scattered throughout the area. The surfer thought there were two or three seals close to shore around the surf zone.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 150 metres

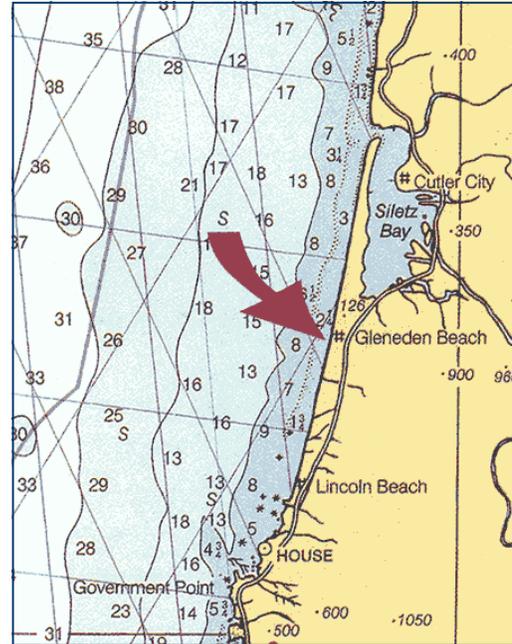
**DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE:** 1.5 to two fathoms

**TIME:** Between 09h30 and 10h00

**NARRATIVE:** John Forse arrived at the beach around 08h00. He saw four surfers 100 to 150 metres from shore. After spending several minutes on the beach relaxing, Forse entered the water and paddled out toward the surfers. Upon reaching the surfers, he recognized Randy Weldon (GSAF 1983.09.20) as one of the four.

Forse, Weldon, and their three companions all surfed for about an hour. It was at this time that Weldon had an almost paralyzing ominous feeling sweep over him; he shook and shuddered as though he had stepped into a freezer. Forse recalled, "I figured a seal had just broken the surface and scared him, as there had been seals in the vicinity. He [Weldon] almost jumped out of his skin. About 10 minutes later the other surfers [Weldon and three companions] had gone in and I was out alone. About five minutes before the attack I saw something break the surface of the water about 20 yards north of me, but figured it was a seal."

Forse was lying prone on his board, waiting for a wave, when the board and his upper leg were bitten and held and he was pulled below the water's surface. He began striking the



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side of the shark with a clenched right hand, but couldn't see what he was hitting; he only knew it was solid. After three or four punches Forse was released and he surfaced, gulping a breath of air. To his amazement, "a huge white shark was hovering in the water right next to me. My side was against the [shark], and his dorsal fin was an arm's length away. I started beating his back in front of his dorsal fin three or four times, and he dived straight down, at which time I had a moment of relief." Forse's relief was short-lived, as suddenly he was pulled beneath the surface a second time. The shark had taken his ankle leash in its mouth and was sounding. "I opened my eyes and tried to get my bearings, but all I could see was this gray mass pulling me down and all these bubbles going by," said Forse. "I tried to reach my cord release on my ankle [leash], but couldn't reach it due to my injured leg and the force of being pulled down. It was at this moment that quiet resignation came over me that I was going to die. Then suddenly the tension on my leash was gone and I surfaced." The shark's serrated teeth had severed the cord.

Upon reaching the surface, Forse saw that his board was seven to 10 metres away. He sprinted to the board, righted it, climbed on and caught the next wave. He pulled himself through the water with his arms while frequently looking back to see if the shark had returned. Finally, he was able to catch a wave that took him onto the beach.

**INJURY:** Forse's wounds consisted of eight individual tooth punctures, ranging from 2.5 cm to five cm in length.

**FIRST AID / TREATMENT:** When he reached shallow water, Forse put weight on his injured leg and realized that no irreparable damage had been done. Two friends, Parrish Olsen and Ali Ben Hammou, had seen what happened and ran to Forse as he negotiated his way through the shallow water. Olsen and Ben Hammou wanted to call 911, but Forse insisted that his leg "was working okay" and that they drive to the hospital. En route to the hospital they were stopped by police officers for a speeding violation. When the police officers observed the injuries to Forse, they allowed them to proceed to the hospital.

Forse was alert upon arrival at North Lincoln Hospital in Lincoln City. Emergency room physician Bruce Watanabe tended to the injured surfer. His wounds required 50 stitches, but recovery was expected to be complete.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The measurements of the tooth impressions in Forse's surfboard and leg were comparable to those of a white shark five metres in length (see next page).

**NOTE:** Not only does Forse continue to surf, but he also now produces surfing videos of Oregon's coast.

**SOURCE:** Ralph Collier (2003), pages 161-163

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Ralph Collier

Photograph courtesy of John Forse



*Note the distance between tooth impressions of the shark in the surfboard*