

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 2004.11.15

DATE: Monday November 15, 2004

LOCATION: The attack took place in False Bay off Fish Hoek Beach, Western Cape Province, South Africa.

34°08'S, 18°26,5'E

NAME: Tyna Webb

DESCRIPTION: She was a 77-year-old female who had been swimming at the same beach six days a week for 17 years. A friend, Bryony Whitehead, described her as an elegant, strong swimmer, but thought she might have been caught off guard because her favorite stroke was the backstroke. At the time of the attack, she was wearing a red swimming cap.

Webb was born in Bloemfontein and obtained a BA, majoring in English and Latin, from the University of the Free State. She taught English in Pretoria and Linden High School in Johannesburg, and also lectured at the Soweto Teachers' Training College. In 1987 Webb and her husband, Jan, moved to Cape Town and then to Sunny Cove in 1989. Since her husband's death 11 years ago, she has been living alone. "She was a remarkable, brilliant woman. Many people will fondly remember her, also the many black children she helped put through school," said her niece, Mimi Greyling of Johannesburg. Webb leaves five children and eight grandchildren. Her daughter Isabel is married to Dr Tom Spies. Another daughter, Katrien Matthee, lives in Hermanus where her husband runs a restaurant at Onrus. Two sons, Harry and Hans, respectively live in New York and Philadelphia, and John, her youngest son, lives in Durban.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a fine, cloudless and beautiful summer morning. On the day of the attack, air temperatures at Fish Hoek ranged from 26° to 16°C, and there were fresh to strong (18 to 35 km/h) south to southeast winds over False bay, but the wind in Fish Hoek was weak with no whitecaps to camouflage the sound of her splashing arms and legs.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, November 12, 2004

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was calm and the water was unusually warm. There was no swell and very little surface chop; Fish Hoek is well-protected from swells and the southeaster had not yet started to blow hard.

ENVIRONMENT: The beach is about 1,5 kilometres long and is located 101 kilometres from Table Bay. It is flanked to the north by the Silvermijn Stream and to the south by a rocky

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Photo: Fish Hoek Valley Tourism

Tranquil Fish Hoek, where Tyna Webb went swimming six days a week.

promontory about 0,5 kilometres in length which ends at Sunny Cove.

It was suggested that fishing boats returning to Kalk Bay laden with freshly caught and bleeding fish might have inadvertently lured the shark to the shore by leaving an unintended trail of "chum" due to the blood from their catches being pumped into the sea from their bilges and washing off their decks. When the southeaster blows, all that blood and old bait trailing behind the boats get blown towards the shore too and it must draw sharks to the shore, said some. Offal from fish cleaned on boats or in the harbour which ended in the sea may also had an effect. Kalk Bay harbour master Pat Stacey agreed that fishermen threw old bait overboard while on their way to port, but said the caught fish bled only to a limited extent. Fishermen also had to land their catch uncleaned, according to regulations, he said. "I don't believe that the fishing boats would be much of a factor," he said.

Sharks had been spotted near the bay two days earlier and there was an influx of fish into the bay. There was a thrashing school of trapped white steenbras, *Lithognathus lithognathus*, in a treknet in Fish Hoek bay. Stacey reported that fishermen had been releasing the steenbras when they noticed the shark. (White steenbras are a protected species and when accidentally caught, they must be released.) Steenbras in a net normally kick up so much commotion that the water looks like it's boiling, and the vibrations of the struggling fish may have attracted the shark closer to shore. "The fishermen saw the shark close to their net but then it swam away parallel to the beach towards where the lady was swimming," said Stacey.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 20 metres

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: Unknown

TIME: 07h00

NARRATIVE: Tyna Webb was swimming alone about 60 metres off Jagger Walk. Fisherman Jeffrey Andries, who saw the attack through binoculars, said Webb had been doing backstroke, "swimming directly into the path of the shark".

Tim Atkins, in a car high on the mountainside, was one of a dozen witnesses to the attack. "I suddenly saw a shark coming at great speed from the Kalk Bay end of the beach towards where the woman was swimming," he said. "The shark hardly slowed down. It just hit her and the water was full of blood. It made two turns, grabbed her in her side and pulled her under the water. The shark then turned and headed out to sea. I think it had the woman in its jaws."



Album photo of Tyna Webb

False Bay Yacht Club rear commodore Paul Dennett witnessed the attack from his home, about 100 metres from the attack site. He saw a lot of thrashing in the water, went outside and saw the shark attacking something (initially he thought it was a seal). "Then I saw somebody in the water; there was a helluva lot of blood." Dennett immediately called rescue services to raise the alarm. "The shark came out of the water and attacked, came around and attacked again a second time, and then a third time. It was thrashing her body in the

water and then swam off with her. It came around and its whole mouth came out of the water, and not even breaching the water [the shark] took her down,” said Dennett. “All that was left was a little red bathing cap about 100 metres from where the bloodied water was dissipating.”

Webb’s son-in-law, Dr Tom Spies, identified the bathing cap as belonging to his mother-in-law.

Dennett's fiancée, Tanya Berry, also saw the shark attacking Webb. “It circled her. Half its body then emerged from the water. It grabbed her and shook her around. There was lots of blood.” Berry started shouting in an attempt to attract the attention of a second swimmer. Dennett said that during the attack they screamed to other bathers enjoying their ritual early morning swim to get out of the water. On average there are about 30 to 40 swimmers at Fish Hoek beach in the early morning.

Two National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) rescue craft and an SA Navy Namacurra, a fast patrol craft, were summoned to search for the woman, and a red Skymed helicopter was dispatched to the scene. NSRI spokesperson Craig Lambinon reported that the helicopter spotted a large shark in the vicinity of Clovelly, near Fish Hoek. “The shark is bigger than the helicopter... it is huge,” he said. The search for the woman's body was called off at mid-morning and surrounding beaches were closed.

INJURY: Fatal.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The attack involved a white shark, said to be 5.5 to six metres [18' to 20'] in length.

NOTE: Theo Ferreira, the infamous white shark tour operator who lost his license last year for chumming close to Kalk Bay bathing beaches, said he believed that the white shark’s fully protected status was causing a population increase which was “detrimental to public safety”. (White sharks have been protected in South African waters since 1990.)

However, shark expert Dr. Leonard Compagno, Director of the Shark Research Institute and founder of the Shark Research Centre at the Iziko-SA Museum, said there was no way of knowing whether the white shark population is increasing at present. “With animals that are so highly mobile and that can migrate from here to Australia and back, there’s no way of saying what the reality is, and at present we have only an inkling of the local numbers and population dynamics.”

But even if there is a local increase in the number of sharks, this would not necessarily translate into an increased number of attacks, Compagno said. “It’s just that people tend to focus on sharks in a way that they do on few other things. The risk [of an attack] is always there, just like the risk of drowning is always there – the ocean is more dangerous than sharks are or could ever be. Shark attacks do happen, they have happened, they will always happen, but the apocalypse is not upon us and the sky is not falling. An attack is always a possibility, unless you don’t go into the water.”

REPORTED BY: J.P. Botha, Marine Dynamics



Tyna Webb (woman in the picture) was taken by a Great White shark on the 15th of November 2004.

“It was by complete accident I photographed this picture of her whilst trying to do a nice landscape picture of Jagger’s Walk also known as the Catwalk in Fish Hoek.

“It was only after the sad incident that someone brought to my attention that every day after her morning swim far out to sea Tyna could be seen walking along the Catwalk back home carrying her bathing cap and wearing her white robe. It is in memory of her I post this picture.”

SOURCE: <http://myphotographer.wordpress.com/2008/11/14/fish-hoek-shark-attack/>