

**ACTIVITY:** Surfing

**CASE:** [GSAF 2005.06.05](#)

**DATE:** Sunday June 5, 2005

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Atlantic Ocean off 18th Street in Surf City on Long Beach Island, New Jersey, USA.

39°66'N, 74°17' W

**NAME:** Ryan Horton

**DESCRIPTION:** He is a 17-year-old male from Forked River, New Jersey. He is 5'6", weighs 135 pounds and was wearing a black wetsuit. He wore a surfboard leash on his right ankle.



*Ryan Horton*

### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** At 11h35, the weather station at nearby Belmar recorded partly cloudy skies and visibility of 10 miles [16.1 km]. Air temperature was 86°F [30°C], dew point 66.2°F [19°C], humidity 51%, sea level pressure 30.00 inches [1015.8 hPa], and wind direction was west-southwest at 10.4 mph [16.7 km/h].

**MOON PHASE:** Waning Crescent, 0% of the Moon was illuminated

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The water was murky due to sand turbulence, and the sea temperature was "in the upper 50s". Wave height was two to three feet. According to the surfer, the incident took place at low tide.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Surf City is on a barrier island (Long Beach Island). Bluefish were in the water and the surfer was near a jetty when he was injured. According to Chief of Police Collins, bluefish were running right next to the jetty. An underwater survey reveals that the area around the jetty is littered with debris including rocks, timber, pipes and building materials, and there is a gully that extends from shore to a sandbank about 10 feet from the beach.

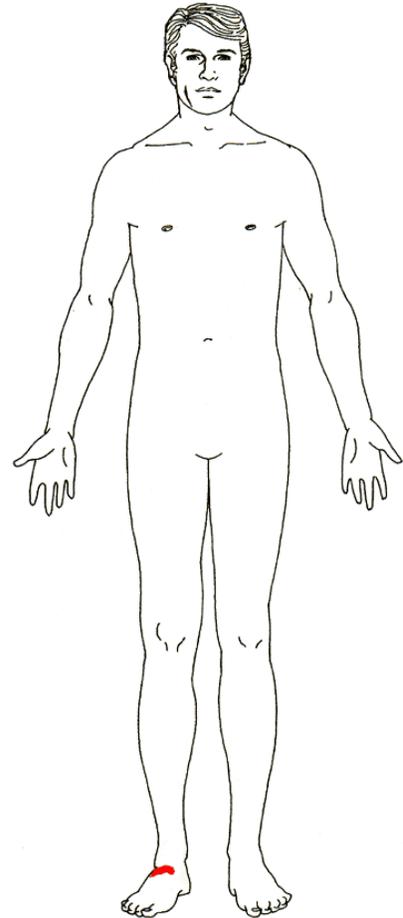
**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 25 feet

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Three feet

**TIME:** 11h30

**NARRATIVE:** Ryan Horton had just ridden a wave inshore and jumped off his surfboard in shallow water when he was injured. He was 15 feet seaward of the sandbar and adjacent to the jetty, facing shorewards, standing/crouching in waist-deep water and pulling his surfboard towards him when his ankle felt as if it "was hit with a baseball bat." The surfer paddled inshore and was taken to the hospital by family members.

**INJURY:** Lacerated wound of right ankle approximately three and a half inches in length and one inch in width.



**TREATMENT:** The surfer received treatment at Southern Ocean County Hospital. While awaiting treatment, he told Aaron Hugg (whose grandmother was being admitted), that he struck his foot on his surfboard fin. He also told emergency room personnel that he struck his foot on his surfboard fin. Emergency room personnel repaired the wound with 50 stitches. He was subsequently seen by a “foot doctor” (Dr. Gasco [sic?]) from Manahawkin.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The surfer’s uncle photographed the injury (see below) using his cell phone. The surfer’s mother subsequently emailed the cell phone image to a researcher in Florida, who told the family the boy had been bitten by either a white shark or a sandbar shark. Apparently the family contacted the media, and the media contacted the researcher who was quoted as saying it was a “slam dunk”, restating that Ryan had been attacked by a six-foot white shark that was two to three years of age, and adding that he could see definite tooth impressions from three teeth and possibly a fourth.

Subsequently three white shark experts (Ralph Collier, author of *Shark Attacks of the Twentieth Century*; Erich Ritter, Ph.D, author of several books on sharks and himself a shark attack victim; and Marie Levine, author of books on sharks and archivist of the Global Shark Accident File) who have a combined total of 80 years experience working with white sharks and investigated hundreds of shark accidents in Australia, the Bahamas, Egypt, South Africa, and the United States, disagreed. They concur that photo shows no tooth impressions of a white shark, nor any other species of shark. The injury resulted either from a surfboard or underwater obstruction such as a pipe or log.

**SOURCES:** Underwater survey of the site conducted June 10, 2005 by marine biologist Brian Switak and Bonnie Espinosa of the Shark Research Institute; interviews with Senator Leonard Connors, Mayor of Surf City; Mary Madonna, Surf City Town Clerk; Chief of Police Collins; Aaron Hugg, and the Horton family.

Horton injury



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*At right, bite mark of a six-foot white shark. Note the wide spaces between insertion of individual teeth of the shark, characteristic of a white shark bite*