

**ACTIVITY:** Windsurfing

**CASE:** [GSAF 2012.10.07](#)

**DATE:** Sunday October 7, 2012

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean at Davenport Landing, Santa Cruz County, California, USA.

*Longitude:* 37.021417;

*Latitude:* -122.218480

**NAME:** Gunnar Proppe

**DESCRIPTION:** He is a 42-year-old software engineer from Santa Cruz. He is 5'9" tall, weighs 145 lbs, and was wearing a black wetsuit with grey shoulders/arms and blue accents.

**WINDSURFER:** A 75-litre windsurfing board (227.5 cm long, 54.4 cm wide), five-square-metre sail. The sail is clear with red and black. Bottom of the board is brown/gold with bright color splotches (yellow, orange, blue).



*Davenport Landing / Google Earth*

## **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** Sunny, warm, high clouds slightly to the South, wind was getting weak (under 15 knots). At 18h53, Watsonville recorded clear skies and 10-mile visibility. The air temperature was 60.1°F, dew point 52°F, humidity 75%, sea level pressure 29.96 inches (rising), and wind direction was East at 6.9 mph.

**MOON PHASE:** Waning Gibbous, 55% of the Moon was illuminated. Last Quarter, October 8, 2012.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** Some wind waves. A good swell.

**ENVIRONMENT:** "I noticed a bunch of sea birds diving close to shore," said the windsurfer. "Not highly unusual but I remember noticing it before the attack. No marine mammals were observed, no one was fishing and there was no deep channel in the area."

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 450 yards

**DEPTH OF WATER:**

**TIME:** 18h30

**NARRATIVE:** "I had had a great 60 - 90 minute windsurfing session and was heading in for my last tack back to the beach since the wind was steadily getting weaker. I was sailing pretty slowly (not planing) as I was heading upwind. I noticed sea birds diving near the beach and remembered that could be a sign of schools of fish under the surface, but I'd seen that before so I wasn't too concerned.

"A couple of minutes later there was a tremendous jolt under my board which threw me into the air. At first I thought I'd hit some kelp but realized quickly that I hadn't been going fast enough to have that kind of impact. I landed in the water, between my board and the sail, which had fallen downwind of the board. I simultaneously felt something brush against my right toe and saw a grayish-tan fin, which my hand touched.

"This was when I realized I was in a very bad situation. I flailed for a few seconds, trying to scramble onto my board. Eventually I made it onto it and lay like a cat trying to get out of water for a few seconds and looked to the right to find that the impact had broken the mast

about 18" up from the base, rendering the sail useless. This was the moment I felt that I might panic because I started thinking about what it was going to be like when the shark came back for me. I focused on how to get out of the situation as quickly as possible. Knowing that the rig would make paddling impossible, I struggled for a few more seconds, trying to detach it and finally got it loose. I briefly tried to pull out the broken mast to use as a weapon but realized that was taking too long so I said 'good-bye' to the rig and lay on my belly and started the long paddle back to shore. "My perception of time was probably really skewed at this point, but I estimate that this was about 5 minutes after the attack. The universal joint (a 4" piece of plastic and metal that attaches the mast to the board) was hitting my throat as I paddled so I stopped and detached it. Before chucking it I held it in my hand and decided that with the metal bolt on the bottom it might be useful as a weapon (absurd to think of it now, but I thought I might have a chance to hit the shark's nose with it). I tried to shove the universal in my harness but I didn't want to waste any paddling time so I just bit down on it and kept paddling as steadily as I could, aiming for the break zone in the lower reef. At this point there was a surfer in the break and one last windsurfer downwind. I stopped a couple of times, sat up and shouted warnings at them as loud as I could but they didn't seem to hear. After a few more minutes of paddling, I got close enough to the surfer to gesture and shout for him to head to shore, which he eventually did. Just as I was getting to the break, the last windsurfer, Ed, reached me and said he was keeping an eye on me. I managed to catch a wave on my belly, keeping a vice grip on the board, and rode the wave straight to shore, only stopping once I was in 4" of water.

"Once on the beach, I noticed that my toe was bleeding enough to pool up on the rocks. I don't know if I'd already cut it on the reef before the attack (and maybe the blood had attracted the shark) or if the shark's tail had sliced it when it brushed by.

"I am grateful that the shark never came back for me. I'm grateful for Ed, the windsurfer who responded to my shouts, because I think knowing he was there gave me confidence to paddle for the wave and surf it in. I'm grateful for a lot of things right now." ... *Gunnar Proppe*

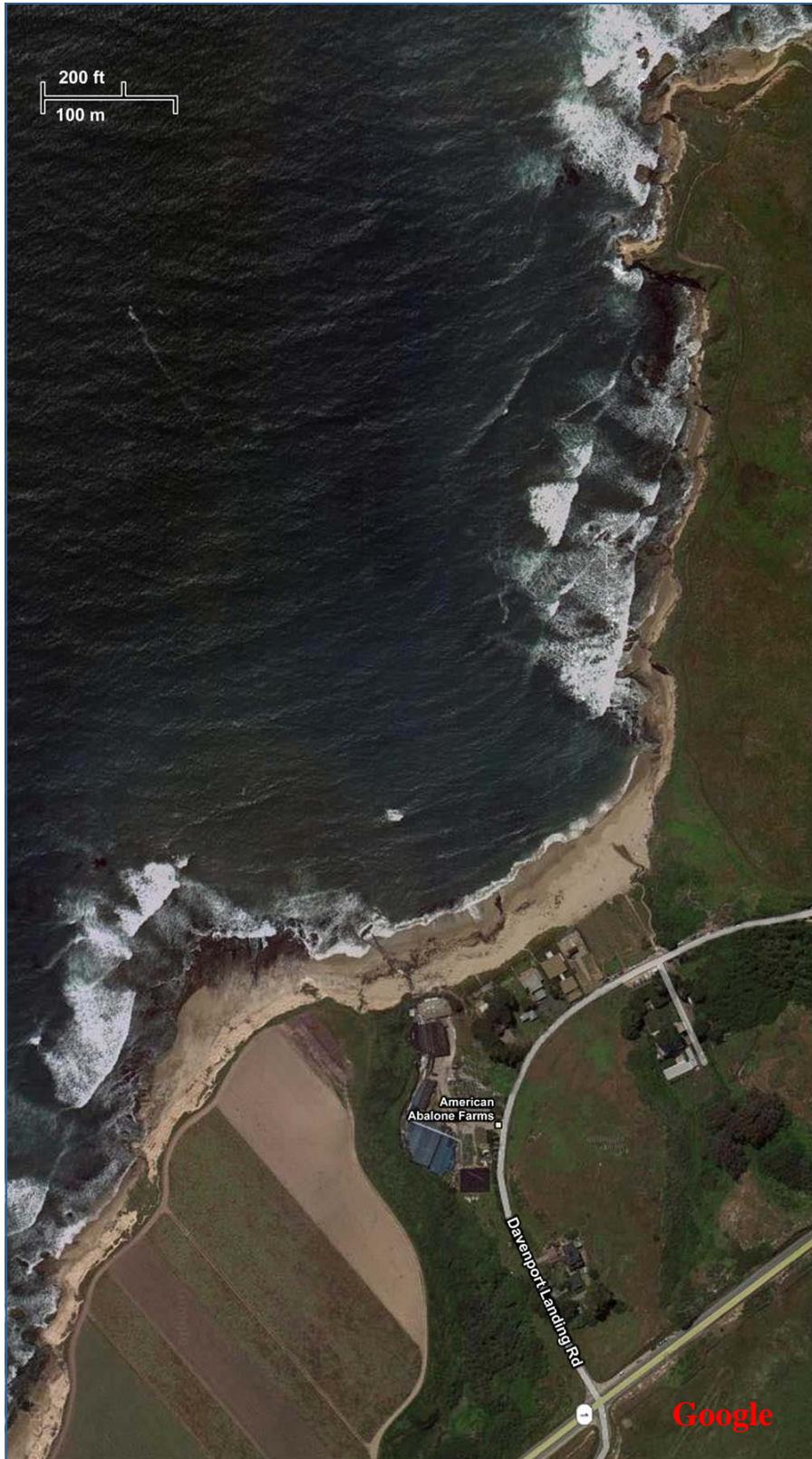
**SPECIES:** "All I saw was a fin (not sure if dorsal or tail, but I think it was the tail). Grey/tan color. About 8" to 12" stuck out of the water but I don't think I was seeing the whole thing."

**NOTE:** Based on his experience, the windsurfer made the following recommendations:

- Late in the evening, if the wind is dying, just walk the gear up from the lower reef. Don't head out to sail upwind back to the beach.
- Pay attention to the marine life. Lots of diving sea birds is an indication of a lot of fish in that area, which can attract larger predators (or maybe that the fish are fleeing them).
- Make it your one focus in life to get back to shore in the fastest way possible. When I started thinking about how bad the situation was, and what was going to happen when the shark came back for me, I think I was on the edge of panic. Making it a job to get out of the situation brought me back from that edge.
- Stay with your board. If you're a windsurfer, learn to surf, too. Knowing how to paddle and how to catch a wave are essential.
- Learn to tack so you don't have to go out so far to head upwind.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Ralph Collier

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IMG-2389

A head-on angle of the whole board.  
It is about 7 1/2 feet tall.



IMG-2374

The puncture in IMG\_2368 is smack dab in the middle of the board.

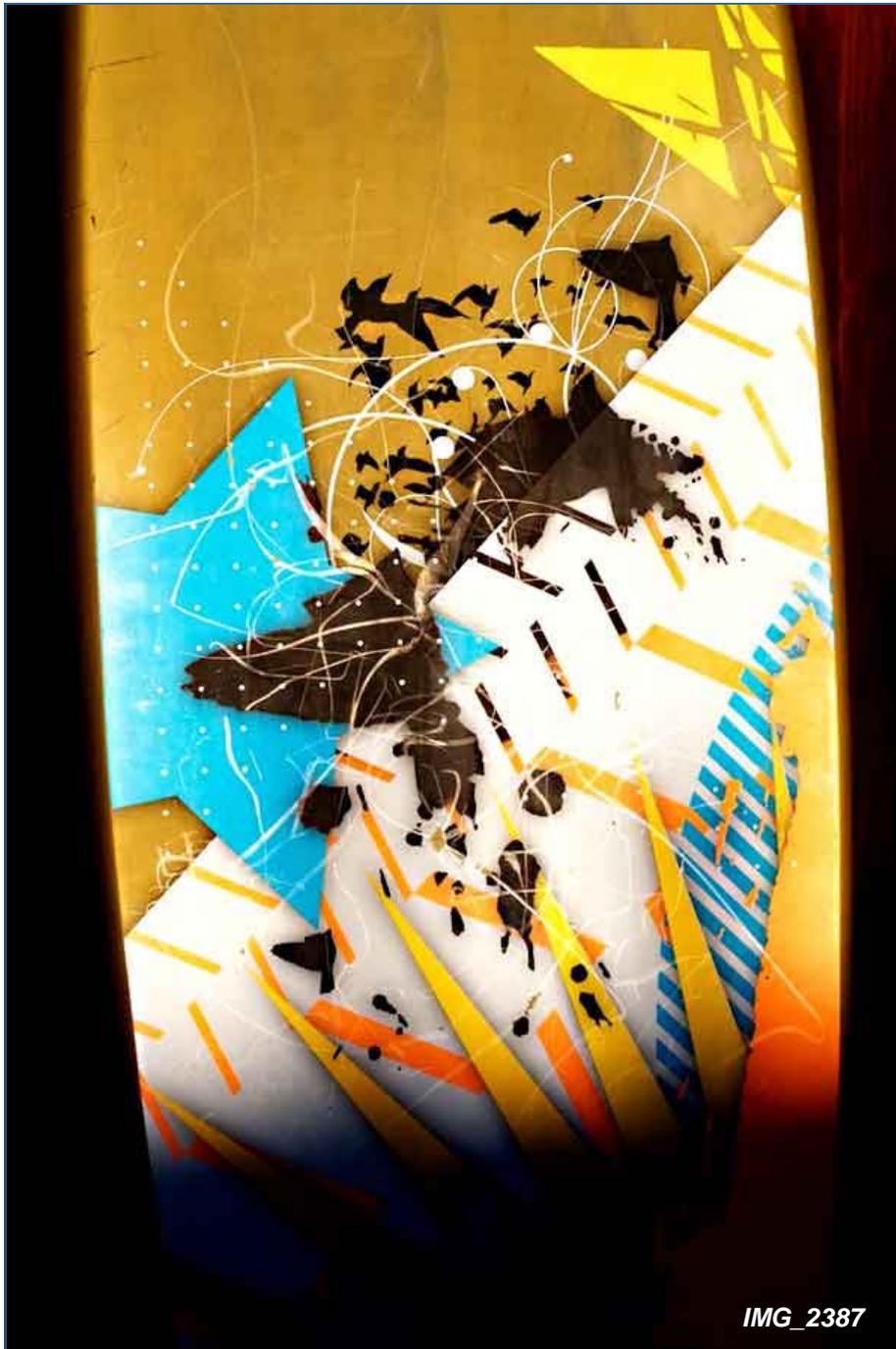
If you look at the blue star with the black bird shape, where the white diagonal border is, the crack (seen in IMG\_2368) just to the right of the bird's belly, under the blue triangle tip of the star that's pointing to the right of the photo.



*Here's the actual crack. It's about 1/4 across.*



*Indented scratches near the logo.*



*This is where it gets interesting and confusing. Those black scratches on the left side in the top half of the photo (on the board's rail) are old ... The other confusing part in the shot is the design of the board, which has these flowing lines in the background. But the confused scratches which I tried to capture with this angle of light, I don't think I ever noticed those before today. But it seems pretty all over the place and doesn't seem like it would match rows of teeth. Perhaps it's a combination of scratches from both incidents -- the rock and the shark?*

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